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LOVE CALLING

By
MAURICE DEKOBRA

TRANSLATED FROM
"LA VOLUPTÉ ECLAIRANT LE MONDE"
BY METCALFE WOOD

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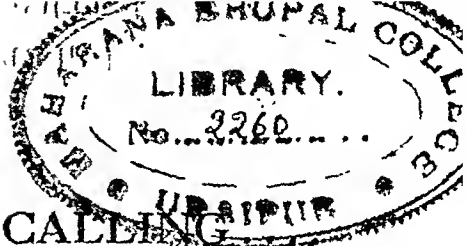
*No scene in this story is taken from life
and all the characters are purely imaginative*

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LOVE CALLING

I

Two women were dining tête-à-tête. The twilight of a June evening enveloped the valley of the Loire. The river was flowing peacefully, reflecting the splendour of the evening, surrounding its sandy banks and wooded islets in a framework of liquid gold. All the windows of the château Plessis-Bréau were open; open also were the French windows of the large dining-room decorated in stone grey and dark oak, with here and there a strip of Flanders tapestry and the rich colours of rare Italian china.

The two women were : Madame Brennoy, châtelaine of Plessis-Bréau, and Nadia Brasiloff, her companion. They did not talk much in front of Edgar, the butler, a sentinel in black and white, standing near the sideboard, which was covered with silver and cut glass. Madame Brennoy spoke occasionally. Nadia answered discreetly. The distant rumble of the Nantes express broke the silence. The butler dropped a knife on a plate. A blackbird flew across the terrace giving a shrill call as it disappeared into the bushes in the park. Then Nadia said to the butler :

"I have left Madame's medicine in the boudoir, Edgar. Will you bring it with the *tillend*."

"Yes, Madame"

Madame Brennoy gave Nadia a smile, thanking her for her thoughtfulness. Again there was silence. But it was not a sad silence. It was as though the two women were enjoying the splendour of the evening and did not wish to break the spell of the gorgeous sunset, the harmony and rhythm of nature, by superfluous words.

After dinner they sat on the terrace. With her usual forethought Nadia arranged the cushions on the deck chair, covered Madame Brennoy's feet with an embroidered shawl, brought her her *tilleul* in a dainty china cup; took two pieces of sugar with the silver tongs and dropped them in very gently, poured out the soothing infusion with great care, re-arranged the cushions behind Madame Brennoy's head and handed her the cup after having stirred it gently with the fleur-de-lys spoon.

Madame Brennoy smiled sweetly.

"Nadia, my dear, I don't know what I should do without you. I ought to have met you when I was thirty, not fifty!"

Nadia smiled back, obviously pleased.

"Oh! At thirty you had no need of me. Your husband was alive."

"Quite true. But my poor husband never spoilt me. He was a greater egoist than I am, if that is possible."

"You, an egoist? No. You love your comfort, you hate to be alone. I can understand that."

"You are indulgent, my dear. To tell the truth,

I am in clover. I could not wish for a better companion. It is true, Nadia. When I do not want to talk, you are silent and go about the house as quietly as a mouse. When I am in good spirits and want to let myself go, you always seem to be in the same mood. Tell me, in your country, did you never take a course of instruction for the diplomatic service?"

"What you think is due to diplomacy is merely my affection for you."

"Nadia, do you remember that on New Year's day I asked you to call me Pauline? After living two years together I did not wish to be 'Madame.' It worries me. 'Madame' no more. I beg you to dispense with formalities and call me by my Christian name, like a friend."

"I remember with pleasure, you know I do, Pauline. If I had only considered my affection for you I should have dared to do so long before. But, after all, I am, in reality, your servant, and I belong to a country where class distinctions were very marked under the old regime, naturally."

"Class distinctions, my dear? I am a rich woman of the middle class, and you are an aristocrat ruined by the Revolution. So you see?"

"Will you have a little more *tillet*?"

"No, thank you. I shall go to bed early. I confess that the good news I got this morning has tired me. Nadia, give me my bag. I must read André's telegram for the tenth time."

Madame Brennoy took up her lorgnettes set with diamonds and read the message with infinite delight.

The specialist has given me permission to leave the sanatorium this summer. Will come and stay near you, dear Mother. Shall arrive Wednesday noon by car.
Love: Andre

A mother's happiness lit up her face, her optimism had increased tenfold. She wanted to express once more her delight to her companion.

"You are too young to understand it, my child. My André, whom I thought would never get better, is leaving the sanatorium for several months. It is the outcome of the consultation the other day. There is no doubt that, if he is not entirely cured, he is, at any rate, convalescent. Just think what that means to me. He is all I have in the world. To see my boy again, my only boy, the joy of my life, to have him near me and not to have to kiss him hurriedly during a brief visit to Leyzin, in that terrible atmosphere of illness, silent sorrow, false hopes and secret grief!"

"Yes, yes, I understand."

"Think of it! Twenty three. He is only twenty three. He is clever, well read, artistic. He is a fine, well built boy. I am not saying that just because I am his mother. And think of it, his father left him five million francs on his majority. He is eligible from every point of view. It would have been terrible to see him die at twenty three, so accomplished, so keen, so enthusiastic. He has everything in the world to make him happy. It would have been unjust, Nadia!"

Her companion had listened without expressing

any opinion. Suddenly, when she heard the phrase, "*It would have been unjust*," she trembled. The expression of her face became hard. Her lips pursed. But it was only for an instant. A smile immediately took its place. A kindly, polished, blasé smile. With supreme suavity she took the bag that Madame Brennoy handed to her and replied :

"Alas ! Pauline, justice in this world is an anæsthetic that men have invented to elude their disillusiones."

"How pessimistic, my dear !"

"No, no. I'm joking. It is not true. We ought not to look on the dark side of life. Your son is coming back ; hope is reborn, both for him and for you ; happiness is coming back to the château through the front door. I am happy too."

"How good you are !"

Madame Brennoy got up. Nadia remarked quickly :

"It is getting chilly. You are wise to go in. In case you feel you do not want to sleep I have put a book that I bought in Tours, at your bedside. A romantic story of the life of *Heloise and Abelard*. The success of the season."

"Thank you, Nadia. Come to me at nine o'clock to-morrow morning and we will make all the arrangements for André's arrival."

"Good-night, Pauline."

"Sleep well, my child."

Madame Brennoy went to her room. Nadia made her way towards the library. Madame Brennoy suddenly called her :

"Nadia!"

The companion turned round, murmuring: "Again!" and went to the room, the most beautiful room of Plessis Bréau, with its historic bed in which Diane de Poitiers had forgotten her vows with a lieutenant of the Royal Wolfhounds attached to the Court.

"Nadia, in case it slips my memory to-morrow, remind me, in going to Tours, to take my jewels from my safe at the *Crédit Lyonnais*. I want to wear them in honour of André's return."

"I won't forget."

"It is strange that my son's telegram has so affected me that I do not feel sleepy. Stay here whilst I go and undress, and when I am in bed, read something to me."

Nadia suppressed a gesture of impatience, and in her seductive voice, with its Slav accent, replied:

"What would you like, would you like some verses from *du Musset*? Some prose? *George Sand*?"

"What would be most likely to send me to sleep?"

"Poetry, I think. *Lamartine's* alexandrines read with a lilt in a monotonous tone are better than a dose of chloral."

"Then give me a spoonful of *Lamartine*, my dear. And whilst I do my hair, take off this extra bed-cover. Will you also put my decanter of Malaga and my biscuits on the table near to me. That silly *Amélie* always puts them so far away that I get uncovered in reaching for them. And

Nadia, would you mind putting the shade on that night light on the side there. I dislike sleeping in the dark, but that light is a little too strong."

"I will do so at once."

"Thank you. I'm coming back."

Madame Brennoy went into the boudoir leading to her bathroom. Nadia got up, hastily threw a piece of prune-coloured silk over the offending lamp and shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Then she picked up a copy of Lamartine bound in red leather and sat down near the bed.

She sat there waiting. Suddenly a sharp cry aroused her from her meditations.

"Nadia! Come quickly!"

She ran to the boudoir. Madame Brennoy, in a pale blue satin dressing-gown was standing in front of her dressing-table in a state of great excitement, upsetting her brushes, make-up, powder and little silver boxes.

"My God! What's the matter?"

"Where is my face cream for the night? Amelie has taken it again. It is too much."

Nadia had no difficulty in finding it under Madame Brennoy's handkerchief.

"Here! here is your cream. You must not get into this state over such a trifling thing."

"True. I have not much patience."

"Come! come along to bed. I will read you some charming verses. They will soothe you to sleep like a little child."

"Thank you, Nadia. Ah! If I hadn't you!"

Madame Brennoy, ready at length, got into bed. Nadia sat near. She opened the volume bound in

leather ornamented with gold, and began to read the last canto of the *Pelerinage d Harold*

*Muse of the latter day, no more the height
Of fabled mount dost thou in fancy climb
Man's breast is now the temple where thy light
Alone may kindle into thoughts sublime*

Madame Brennoy suddenly interrupted her

"Stop a moment, my child You have shaded that lamp too much over there I shall awake in the dark in the night Go to the Empire room On the harpsichord you will find a mauve scarf It will be much better, and give a little more light "

Nadia got up

"Very well "

Left alone, Madame Brennoy snuggled down into her lace trimmed pillows, just like a cat curling itself up in the caressing warmth of a cushion She sighed with a heavy heart and took up her oval hand mirror, put out her tongue, noted the wrinkles of her double chin, examined her little teeth, which were still pretty and very white Nadia surprised her as she did so She recovered the lamp and inquired

"What are you doing, Pauline ? "

"Nothing Nothing I was looking at my face It is not too bad after my touch of indigestion the day before yesterday Andre will not find his mother unrepresentable Go on reading, Nadia I am listening to you Those verses are very charming "

Like a priest intoning, her companion continued

*Love ! I have felt the madness of its fire,
The very whisper of its name could send
Such thrilling trembling tones around my lyre
That every chord in unison would blend.*

“Nadia !”

The companion put the red leather volume on her lap.

“Pauline ?”

“I want you to share my happiness in seeing André again. Oh ! the darling ! I would give my life for him. I adore him. Now I think of it, I will give you that crêpe de chine dress. You know, the green one. As I am bigger than you are, you can get it altered by Madame Ledidier at Tours.”

“Thank you, Pauline. I shall be delighted to have it.”

“Go on, my child. Where were you ?”

“One minute. . . . Oh, yes, here” :

*I love, I have been loved, and only crave
These words, with deny tears, to see upon my grave.*

The romantic alexandrines, the soothing hemistiches flowed on in rhythmical cadence in the silence of the historic room. Occasionally Nadia raised her head, looking at her listener like a doctor watching the approaching insensibility of his patient. Her breathing became regular. Her plump hand lay on the lace-edged sheet. Madame Brennoy was snoring gently in three time.

“Rrrrrr. . . . Pfffff. . . . Tuuuuu. . . . Rrrrrr
Pfffff. . . . Tuuuuu. . . .”

Anyway, Nadia began the fifteenth canto :

*Around my sails now sighs the graceful breeze !
My bark is greeted by the joyful tide ;
As though it knew my path amid the seas ,
And like a fery courser in his pride,
Would paw the ground and neigh with rostrils wide*

Lamartine had done his work She read no further She closed the book She got up, went out on tiptoe, shutting the door very quietly. Then walking quickly across the vestibule, annoyed, she threw the volume on a settee and hurried to her room.

II

"ANOTHER spot of Calvados, Monsieur Edgar?" said the head gardener's wife.

The butler immediately held out his little glass.

"Thank you, Madame Bonnesson. I prefer the Calva I get here to the hygienic muck that they swallow over there."

"Here" was Monsieur Bonnesson's cottage. He was the lodge-keeper and head gardener. "Over there" was the château. Twice a week, after dinner, Madame Brennoy's servants came in turn to see them.

Standing about a quarter of a mile from the château, at the end of a majestic avenue of fifty-year-old elms, they were sure that they would not be disturbed; that they could speak their minds without any indiscreet ears interfering with their freedom or their injudicious remarks.

That evening, whilst Nadia was reading the *châtelaine* to sleep, Edgar, the butler, Louis, the chauffeur, and Marthe, the cook, were sitting round the table. The head gardener, by the fireplace, rolled his cigarette. Madame Bonnesson was darning. She remarked, as she threaded her needle:

"I—I would have bet that that telegram contained some news."

Bonnesson jokingly:

"Naturally You are always more knowing than anybody else! But for all that, you would have been very taken aback at seeing her son arrive before Madame Marthe came and told us about it"

The cook shook her head

"Yes, it is a surprise Me, who has been four years with Madame, I have not seen him in all more than two months"

"What's he like?" asked the chauffeur

"A fine young man. You'd never think he was as ill as he is Anyway, it will be one more mouth to feed"

"That is to say, three hundred francs extra for you, every month, eh! Madame Marthe?"

The cook turned to the butler, who never missed an opportunity of chipping and jokingly chiding her, regarding her perks

"You're a nice one to talk What about yourself? What do you do?"

"Do you think it's easy, with that Russian who watches the liqueurs, the cigarettes and everything else. Ah! the day the mussus engaged that cow she would have done better if she'd broken her leg!"

The chauffeur, the last comer into the house, went one better

"You're right! She even watches my petrol! She adds up my bills and says every month 'You ought to manage with twenty five litres per hundred kilometres, don't you think so, Louis?'"

"Then you're up the spout No chance of making a bit"

"Joking apart, I have to make the dial show more. That cooks her goose. It takes me three hours to alter the mechanism. But I make my ten cans a month all the same. And you bet! That little vermin can't teach me mechanics!"

The head gardener lit his cigarette.

"Don't you worry, Monsieur Louis."

"You're right! You others who have been here so long with Madame, do you know how much she is worth?"

"They say her income is five hundred thousand francs a year."

"And the rest, old boy! When I was hanging about at Auteuil last month with a pal who drives a Packard for a financier, we got talking. His master looks after Madame Brennoy's affairs. Well, I tell you one thing sure. She's made thirty million francs in the last three years on the Bourse. So you can be certain that the old cat has an income of two millions if she has a sou. I'll stake my life on it!"

The chauffeur looked round at the company, proud of the effect he had produced. They were indeed astonished. Edgar smacked his clean-shaven lips. Madame Bonnesson nodded her head over her work. Marthe murmured:

"Two millions. And here am I worrying my head about her legs of mutton at ninety francs apiece!"

There was a silence. Edgar put his glass down on the cloth. He added:

"Well, I'll tell you my opinion. When anyone is as rich as that, they leave the servants alone."

They let them have their perks That does nobody any harm We are not hurting their millions! When they can afford to spend five thousand francs a day, one is not going to be worried by a companion who plays the spy for her mistress, counts the lumps of sugar, watches every half hundred of coal and marks the brandy bottle to see if any has been taken "

"You're right, Monsieur Edgar "

"But how much salary does she get, that Ruski? "

"I don't know But one day I saw a cheque stump in her name, two thousand francs "

"Does she get that a month? Board and lodging? And the run of Madame's cast-off clothes? "

"That's about it."

The chauffeur sat up in his chair

"Ah! The dirty slut! Two thousand francs and her to stop me with the petrol It's—it's a bloomin' scandal, that's what it is! "

Madame Bonnesson folded up the mended shirt on her knees She asked the hutler .

"Now, you Monsieur Edgar, you know all about her What sort of a woman is this Nadia? During the two years she has been here I know nothing about her She's that proud All she does when she passes me is nods her head Tell us, is she a broken down countess? "

"Well, to tell you the truth, Madame Bonnesson, the woman has puzzled me for a long time As for her being a countess, that may very well be, why not? All these Russian emigrants have

some sort of title. Travellers tell fine tales. But what did she do before she came to coddle up the missus, that's what I should like to find out. She locks up everything in her room, and as to giving anything away, she'd rather give up the ghost."

The chauffeur laughed :

"I say, Edgar, do you remember the other day when . . ."

Madame Bonnesson looked at him out of the corner of her eye.

"You've got a down on her, Monsieur Louis ! There's something behind this."

Edgar lowered his voice.

"I'll tell you, Madame. My friend here had a bit of a hunch for the Ruski. Well, I don't blame him. She's a good-looker. But one day he went a bit too far, and the Countess put him in his place. You ought to have seen it !"

"What are you talking about ? Nonsense. It isn't true, old boy. I was behind the window in the drawing-room. She withered my friend with one of her looks. You know, one of those looks that in the Tzar's days would have sent him to Siberia for ten years."

"Perhaps so. But times have changed. Since then, Lenin had something to say to Nicolas II. The proof lies in the fact that this 'bird,' who may have had a dozen servants in Russia, is reduced to being at the beck and call of Madame Brennoy. That's one for her."

The head gardener was highly amused at the conversation of the two men. He was less excitable

than the chauffeur, who had worked in a motor factory and who had been influenced by the revolutionary atmosphere. He had adapted himself to the quiet rural ways of the country. He guffawed, slapping his thigh, the dead stump of his cigarette sticking out from the corner of his sandy moustache.

"Listen to the Bolshy! But I know. If she'd given him the key of her room he'd have been a greedy capitalist right enough."

Edgar chipped in with

"Lor' bless me! It isn't every day that a chauffeur has the chance of making the running with a countess. Is it, Louis?"

Louis protested

"Bolshy! Me? Not much! I am decent to the masters who are decent to me, for after all the job has some good things about it, although but people who are always looking for trouble."

Well, I find it for 'em."

The cook had a word to say. Her age gave her the right to express her opinion.

"Anyhow, Monsieur Louis, if you take my advice, and if the place suits you, keep on the right side of the Russian. It isn't Madame who orders. She does. And Madame says *Amen*. I've known that longer than you think, my boys. The first year, the mistress kept her eye on her. This Nadia played her cards very carefully. It was 'Madame' this and 'Madame' that, enough to make you sick. But lately she calls her Pauline, and leads her by the nose, so if she wanted she could give us all the sack in two ticks."

Edgar agreed

"Madame Marthe is right."

"Take it from me, the Dragon—as you call her, Monsieur Louis—and Nadia are like two fingers on one hand. You've only to see how she goes on with her! Wheedling and petting and coaxing. 'A cushion, Pauline? You're not feeling chilly? Ah, I'm forgetting your Malaga!' Mark me, Madame Bonnesson, if I had anyone like that round me I should be on my guard. I should say it is too good to be true."

"However," said the head gardener, "she's well paid. But she earns it all right. If one is a companion you don't put fleas in your mistress's bed. Isn't that so, Monsieur Edgar?"

The butler and the chauffeur burst out laughing:

"He can tell some good 'uns, Monsieur Bonnesson!"

But the cook, with her common sense and her logical mind, returned to the charge:

"You see, you don't follow me. Either the countess is really a woman of the world who has an object in view and is carrying it out, or she is no more a countess than my coffee mill, and God knows where she comes from and what her game is."

Madame Bonnesson, with a fatalistic gesture:

"Those who live longest will see most. In the meanwhile, it's getting late and Célestin has to get up early to-morrow to get the flowers, haven't you, Célestin?"

The head gardener got up:

"Yes. Another of that Russian's ideas. I've got to get twenty pots of blue hydrangeas to put along the terrace under Monsieur André's windows."

The servants said good night and walked back to the château by the side of the low kitchen-garden wall. As they got near the house Edgar remarked that there was a light in Nadia's room. He nudged the chauffeur's elbow.

"There you are, old boy. The countess is waiting for you. Perhaps you'd like to go and pay your respects to her."

"Hang it, Edgar! Would you be upset if you had a chance with her?"

"Oh! me, I'm always ready to be polite to missus's who want me to be obliging, pretty or plain. It don't matter. Before I came here I was at a place in Autemil with a rich old girl, a bit touched, who every now and then wanted me to act as ladies maid at night. Yes, my boy! I put her to bed, that's all, I used to tuck her in; she used to gaze at me like a luney, then she used to scream out "Get away, you naughty fellow! Get away! You upset me! I don't know what I'm doing!" Then I went out quietly, and at the end of the month I got five hundred francs bonus."

"Is that a fact?"

"On my honour! The rich can afford to be a bit dotty, if not their lives would be too dull."

The cook interrupted the conversation. She came to the kitchen door and called out angrily:

"Now then you! Hurry up or I shall throw you out!"

III

NADIA was seated near the window. It was night. A clear night, spreading its blue veil over the peaceful valley ; a soft, ideal night that seemed to challenge the ugly things of life, the pettinesses of humanity and the artificiality of civilisation.

But the silent beauty of the scene did not soothe her feelings of resentment. Her emotional Slav mind was impervious to the charm of the Touraine night, the *Sleeping Beauty* of the ancient land of France. Nadia's soul was seared by the injustice she had suffered. This evening more than ever. Reclining in her armchair, dressed in a black kimono, a present from Madame Brennoy, she thought over the past, she pondered on her bitter recollections, she abandoned herself to the enjoyment of sad regrets and the disappointments of unsatisfied pride and thwarted ambition.

That day, Madame Brennoy had annoyed her. During the two years that she had been in her service, in an equivocal position, an attendant, a reader, a confidant and a friend, she had had time to accustom herself to the character of her mistress. She had fathomed to the bottom the ineffable egotism of this widow so favoured by fortune. She had summed up this rich woman, a spoilt child, who loved to order, who did not admit that she was fortunate ; who considered that anything that

upset her in the least degree was a catastrophe , to whom the slightest trouble became a drama and a refusal to obey a case for hanging

She knew her thoroughly, this stately woman of fifty, who thought of herself, tended herself, and indulged herself in excessive self gratification . She knew—for she was intelligent—that cases of supreme self adoration are not uncommon among women left alone, who are no longer anxious to please, but who wish to extract from a life of ease the quintessence of the lesser delights and the summum of material pleasures . So, cleverly, she had humoured this grey haired lady with her small feet and plump hands , this amiable, tyrannical millionairess, often exasperating but sometimes generous, that the servants had nicknamed the Dragon . With what patience had she tolerated her caprices and her bursts of ill humour , with what forbearance had she carried out her orders and her counter orders , with what a straight or smiling face had she given way to her whims, appeased her doubts, banished her fears !

Ah ! she earned her two thousand francs a month and the odd trinkets that Madame Brennoy gave her ! She was not over paid for the calls in the middle of the night when Madame, suffering from insomnia, begged her dear Nadia to come and read to her at her bedside . The reader was not always able to have recourse to romantic Alexandrines to send Madame to the land of dreams in less time than it took the poet to make love rhyme with dove . Sometimes she read detective stories translated from the English . Conan Doyle or

Edgar Wallace. Then Madame, kept awake by the excitement of the story, sent her to bed, tired out, at four in the morning. It is true, the next day to show appreciation of her devotion, she gave her a lizard skin handbag that she had hardly used.

For two years Nadia tolerated this life. Contented to have found a situation that many exiles would have jumped at. For life is hard for the unfortunate people, who, driven from their country by the red spectre, have been forced to earn a bare livelihood in times made still more difficult by bad trade and restrictions.

What an extraordinarily eventful career, Nadia Feodorovna's! At sixteen she witnesses the prologue to the revolution. Her relations are arrested and shot without trial in the cellars of the Great Loubianka. Why? For nothing. Because they are not proletariats, and because blood must be shed, always bloodshed with communist tyrants. At seventeen, an orphan, Nadia lives alone in an attic with an old prostitute who passed her off as her daughter. Her calvary has begun. She hides herself for fear of being denounced. She learns dancing and lives in daily fear of the men in leather waistcoats, the Tchekists of the Red Star who may come to arrest her, take her before a magistrate, to some sadistic Jew, who will enjoy the luxury of putting her to mental torture; until the day when she will die of typhoid at Solovski, unless a browning at her neck does not drown, in a pool of blood, the sweet dream of this young Moscovite virgin.

At the age of nineteen, in 1920, she succeeds in escaping from the Bolchevik hell. That cost her her honour at Odessa, where she is smuggled into a cargo boat bound for Turkey.

Stamboul welcomes her along with thousands of other exiles who are fleeing from the regime of the sickle and the hammer. She must live. She is without resources, a young girl wandering from Galata to Taxim, searching her daily bread. She finds work at the *Turquoise*. She washes the dishes at this cosmopolitan restaurant, where the riff raff of Pera eat. She is dismissed to make room for a woman from Kief who gives her favours to the Manager. A woman smothered in make up has noticed her, Madame Danadis, a Levantine who speaks Turkish, Greek, Arabic, English and French, she keeps a salon where one trifles with love, a discreet house near the *Casino des Petits Camps*. Madame Danadis provides exotic pleasures for the officers on the passing ships, for distinguished foreigners and the *gentlemen* of emancipated Turkey. Necessity forces Nadia to her house. The evening of her first tête à tête with a gentleman who is introduced as "ready for anything," "he wishes she were dead. She contemplates suicide. But, as she is only twenty-one, the love of life is too strong. She throws the bottle of veronal away and goes back to Madame Danadis. Lovers of an hour follow one another, each paying twenty Turkish pounds, of which ten go into the pocket of the amiable proprietress. Calvary. Degradation. A terrible initiation for a young woman, who not long ago

had Utopian ideas and dreamed of Shakespearean romances as she played Chopin's waltzes. But Nadia is resolute. She will submit stoically to the cruel ordeal, she will become a singer in a café-concert and escape one day from this hell. A friend writes to her from Paris :

Come to France, my dear. The life you are leading over there on the Bosphorus will ruin you for ever. Here you will have a better chance. I am, myself working at a leather factory. We make fancy leather bags. We are not discontented with our lot. At any rate we are independent, and live fairly happily in a hospitable country amongst people who sympathise with us in our trouble. . . .

Nadia starts off for France. Her dazzling beauty, tarnished at Pera by her association with coarse-minded men, is returning. She has fifteen thousand francs savings. She has hope in her heart. Paris, the Eldorado of women, welcomes her with a smile. She looks forward to honest work, liberty and self-respect. She mistrusts men. Love is a nightmare that she wants to forget. She is now almost twenty-three, with the experience of a woman of nearly forty. The seal of the human beast has been set upon her. Her youthful illusions died under the shadow of the Soviet red flag. Her dreams have been dispelled by the house of debauch, her Slav ideals when a young girl, a romantic student fond of Pouchkine, have been strangled by the brutal hands of strangers who bought her at Madame Danaclis' salon. Miserable brutes who

imagined that their passion was returned. Merely groans of disgust!

After her first weeks in Paris, Nadia forgot these terrible recollections. The pleasant *Parisian spring* chased away the shadows of the past. She tried not to remember that there are men in the world, who are gross, sadistic, brutal, vain and ridiculous.

She lived quietly. She had been told that in the West she could make her way without having recourse to the *Madames Danachis* of the capital. She worked as a mannequin at a dress making establishment. The proprietor, who was a regular polygamist, had a harem of stock sizes. The ladies were well paid, well treated but the right of the seigneur was indefeasible. When Mlle Georgette had completed her week, Mlle Gaby went on duty, and on the following Monday handed over her duties to Mlle Germaine, just like the army. The Manageresses knew their business and if they had a favour to give, they said

"It's Daisy's turn. She is the adjutant this week."

Nadia, to escape her turn, resorted to stratagems. Sick headaches, illnesses, bad news from a hypothetical family. She gained several months. Then the proprietor felt piqued at the disdain of this pretty Russian who did not obey his rule, and he let her know that he never made any exceptions. Nadia took no notice. Then, one day, the proprietor called her into his office, and with the cynicism and light heartedness that he considered the best method he asked her

"Mademoiselle, are you well enough to do your work here?"

Astonished, Nadia replied:

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Then as you are well enough to put on a gown before my clients, you are well enough to take one off before me. You will go to the office at the end of the month and take what is due to you. Little saints like you are not wanted here. Au revoir, Mademoiselle."

Nadia then worked for one of her own country women. After that in an office. Years passed. And young Nadia Brasiloff continued to make a bare living. She had found neither the prince charming staggered by her beauty nor the rich city magnate who, according to the ritual, covers the mistress of his choice with gold.

Adventures of a day she could have found by the score, in the metro, the bus or the street; but she had made up her mind not to re-commence that infernal cycle of Pera. In Paris, at any rate, she was able to gain an honest living. Besides, the behaviour of the *couturier* and one or two others had not done anything towards reconciling her with the "superior" sex. She would rather go with one meal a day than take to that life again. She was proud of her long chastity after the terrible afternoons upon the Bosphorus. She felt that she was redeeming herself morally and physically.

At twenty-eight she is a saleswoman at a lingerie shop in the Champs Elysées. After six years struggling along, her hopes died. She had come to

conquer Paris. She has succeeded in keeping herself from starvation. The illusions of the last survivor of the Brasiloff family faded away one by one in a few years. Now she sells slips to triple voile takes down the measurements of *soutien gorge* and smiles pleasantly at clients who hesitate between an almond green lawn or a *crêpe de chine* in tea rose.

One day, one of them who was attracted by this capable and intelligent saleswoman continues to talk to her. They are alone in the shop. Nadia, affected by the kindness of this lady, tells her her troubles. The client exclaims: 'But, my dear, your place is not here.' Saleswoman! You will remain in the same position until you are forty five and at the same salary. Listen. I have a friend very rich, who is looking for a companion. The very thing for you! It will take you out of this *milieu* which is not where you should be. My friend lives in an historic château on the Loire. You will meet interesting people. A companion is like a friend of the family. Who knows? Perhaps it is an unexpected opportunity for you? Anyhow, as soon as my friend comes to Paris I will speak to her about you.'

A month later Nadia made an extremely favourable impression upon Madame Brennoy. She accompanied her to her Chateau at Plessis Breau. A new chapter in her life had commenced.

Whilst Madame Brennoy, in her room below, overcome by Lamartine's soporific verses, snored in three time, Nadia came to the point. She asked

herself if her great hope was on the horizon yet.

Nervous and over-wrought by a particularly heavy day, in the course of which Madame Brennoy had harassed her with orders, good advice, questions, suggestions, hypotheses, without mentioning her alarms concerning her health, nor the changes that the imminent arrival of André would make in the daily routine at the château, Nadia, her hands gripping the arms of the chair, asked herself :

"Well, I am pretty, men have told me so over and over again ; I am well brought up and educated. If it had not been for the revolution I should have become quite rich. I should have succeeded in the theatre, and I should have married a rich man from Petrograd or Moscow. Fate wills it that I should have to attend on this exasperating and crotchety *bourgeoise*. Why ? If God exists, why has he decreed that I, who am better endowed, handsomer than many women who should be waiting on me, why am I the camouflaged ladies' maid of a woman who has done nothing to deserve her good fortune, her wealth and her happiness ? This evening she was talking about justice. Ah ! the unspeakable irony of the word which rings false in the mouths of even the best humans. It is an outrage on the reality of life which should make all those who think and reflect laugh with hideous laughter.

Nadia got up hurriedly. She stood in front of her wardrobe mirror. She scrutinised herself with the severity of a painter criticising a study :

"Let me see. What have I got that is good and

Would she have submitted for two years to the whims of Madame Brennoy if she had not learnt by degrees that she had a son, an only son, heir to millions from his father, who was being treated in a sanatorium in Switzerland, and that one day he would come to live at the château, alone, with Madame Brennoy and her companion? She knew also that this son had no serious liaison and that his mother had no designs for him amongst her friends. Although she was careful not to show too much interest in André, she had cleverly made his mother talk about him. And her confidences drove her to this conclusion: "It is perhaps from this source that I shall find the way out, the realisation of my dreams, the long looked-for sign of my resurrection."

She had been patient. The months passed monotonously. Sometimes, in a careless manner, she asked the mother:

"By the way, I hope that your son is getting better in Switzerland?"

And Madame Brennoy replied:

"Slowly, by degrees, my dear. This pneumothorax has shaken him terribly. But I have great hopes. He will come back to me. He will live at Plessis-Bréau as he did in the happy days before the disease had shown itself."

At last a telegram from André came. An unexpected and happy event. The laconic words on the blue paper made the hearts of the two women beat. The mother, beaming with satisfaction, with her maternal love. The schemer, concealing her impatience.

IV

It was noon. André had just arrived by car for lunch. Madame Brennoy had asked Nadia to have her meal alone. She wished to share his first hours with him and Aunt Berthe, who had come from Vendôme, where she usually stayed from the beginning of June.

For Madame Brennoy, eldest daughter of a rich silk manufacturer in Lyons, had a sister younger than herself, unmarried; Mlle. Berthe Lemailly, who gave singing lessons. She composed also. Her artistic reputation did not extend beyond her intimate circle; however, she had obtained a prize at Tours for a rustic cantata entitled *Epi . . . mon bel Epi !*

She had interpreted it herself at the distribution of prizes at the Lycée Jules-Sandeau, dressed as a harvester with a wreath of corn on her head. Some of the young pupils in long white garments, carrying cardboard sickles had sung the choruses of this cantata, glorifying corn from the wheat which rhymed with fête to the grain which rhymed with wain.

The success of *Epi . . . mon bel Epi* had encouraged Mlle. Berthe Lemailly who, the year following, devoted herself to composing a drinking song entitled *Si les pépins pouvaient parler !* It was naturally in praise of grape juice and Bacchus, an

"Hallo, mother! How are you?"

"How happy I am, my dear! At last!"

Madame Brennoy embraced her son, covered him with kisses, stroked his cheeks. He broke away to kiss his Aunt Berthe.

"Well, my dear nephew? So you are free from the sanatorium."

"André! If you knew what delight your telegram gave me!"

"I hadn't time to write, mother, I was in a hurry to get away, you understand. Hence that short telegram. And you? How are you?"

"Excellent. But tell me about yourself, darling. What do the doctors say?"

Doctor Schwer said definitely:

"My boy, you can spend the summer in France, at home. Off you go and enjoy yourself.' You don't suppose I asked him to repeat it twice."

"Doctor Schwer said that after a special examination?"

"Yes. They examined me this way, that way, upside down, inside out. And there you are! Life is alright, and when the bellows work, everything goes fine!"

"Silly boy! Come and be kissed again."

André did so. Then his mother, leaning over the balustrade, looked at the car:

"Where's your luggage, André?"

The young man hesitated a moment:

"My luggage? Oh, yes! It is at the hotel at Tours."

"What! at the hotel?"

"Yes, when I arrived I fixed up at the *Univers*."

"No, very nice, good looking."

"Ah well, my misfortune. But, let that pass. I'm hungry. The most important thing is to have lunch."

The château bell rang. Madame Brennoy got up :

"Your wish is gratified, André, there's the bell."

With mock ceremony, André bowed to Berthe, and offered her his arm.

"Aunt Berthe, may I conduct you to the throne room?"

"With pleasure, my lord nephew."

"Still a spinster, auntie?"

"Still, my boy, as you see."

"And what do you do on Sunday when it rains and you are not composing cantatas?"

"I pray to God for your health, you bad lad."

The trio went into the dining-room, whilst above, from a window on the second floor, two dark eyes were watching the scene. Nadia, standing behind the half-drawn curtain, had taken in all the details of the arrival of the young traveller. She had come to the conclusion that he looked barely his twenty-three years; that he was tall, well set up, fair, clean shaven, that when he spoke he had a boyish smile which lit up his romantic Byronesque blue eyes, and that he was wearing a tweed cap. Nadia had not missed the smallest detail, not a movement, not an attitude. Unseen from her observation post, she sketched out her programme; she elaborated, in the silence of her room, her future strategy, her left hand on her hip,

"He is not alone. He is with a friend from the sanatorium, a Bavarian student who does not care for family life."

"Curious, don't you think?"

"Yes. But it is only a question of days. When his friend has gone André will be very pleased to come and be made much of here."

"Where are they staying at Tours?"

"At the *Univers*."

"When will he come again?"

"To-morrow, for lunch."

"With his friend?"

"No. I asked him. But he says his friend only speaks German."

"Oh?"

"You seem sceptical, Nadia."

"Oh! not at all."

"I admit that I wonder whether this young Bavarian is a myth or not."

"If he does not exist, what conclusion do you come to?"

"The same as you, I suppose?"

"A woman?"

"Obviously."

"And so?"

Madame Brennoy seemed perplexed. She dropped her cigarette into a cut crystal bowl, and replied:

"André is no longer a child. I know quite well that young people must amuse themselves. Only being aware of his health, I want to make sure that his little escapades are harmless."

Nadia had led the conversation to the point she

"Listen, mother . . . he's not very well off, so I'm paying the bill, you understand."

"Yes, yes, I understand. Ah, well, I will send the chauffeur with the money this evening. Will that do?"

"Yes! Thank you. You are a darling, mother."

"And don't forget to give your friend from Munich a good dinner. Till to-morrow, André."

"Yes, mother. A kiss for you."

Madame Brennoy put down the receiver. She opened the drawer of her bureau and as she put some notes into an envelope, she said to Nadia:

"Indeed, my dear, you shall begin this little inquiry. This Bavarian student has a strong smell of face powder."

Nadia has listened to this conversation. Fortune favoured her. She quickly decided what to do. She followed the manicurist and got into the lift with her. On the landing of the second floor, she went up to her, smiling, and said:

"Pardon, Mademoiselle. You are a manicurist?"

"Yes, Madame."

"What do you charge to go to a client?"

"Twenty francs, Madame."

"Good. Listen to me, Mademoiselle, do you want to earn two hundred francs in half-an-hour?"

"But, Madame . . . Yes . . . I . . . that is to say . . ."

Nadia took her along the passage.

"It is very easy. You are going to attend to Mlle. Monthel's hands. I will hire your things for half-an-hour. Here are two hundred francs. Wait for me downstairs. I will give you your manicure set back as soon as I have finished with your client. You see how simple is it."

The young woman hesitated. Nadia grew insistent.

"See now. What harm is there? I want to speak to your client. I will do her nails instead of you. You stand to gain. So do I. Everybody's pleased. Come on. Go down and read the papers in the salon and wait for me."

The manicurist made an evasive gesture.

"My goodness, if you mean it, Madame, here is my case. I'll wait for you."

"By the way, what is your name?"

"Marguerite."

"The chateaux! Well! if there is one thing that bores me more than another it is historic châteaux. They smell mouldy. Their windows are no bigger than pocket handkerchiefs and one gets a stiff neck looking at the ceilings. Mind, take care of that nail! I split it opening André's Kodak."

"You are married?"

"Yes, married by the sleeping car attendant."

Nadia bent her head down over Gaby's fingers and smiled:

"You are very amusing, Mademoiselle."

"Joking apart. You think I'm fooling? I met Dédé in the express from Geneva to Paris. He winked at me in the corridor. I thought he was nice. We dined together. The attendant gave us two single berths communicating. And, with his blessing and half a bottle of Vittel, we were married between Lorache and Paris. And there you are!"

"In fact, you are staying at Tours with your boy friend?"

"That's right."

"What's he like?"

"Young . . . good looking . . . O.K. He's gone to lunch in the country, to his mother's. She has an estate in the neighbourhood. Cut them a little more pointed, please. Nails that scratch. Men like them."

"Oh!"

"I know what I'm talking about. I have a girl friend at the *Casino de Paris* who has rounded nails. She can never keep a boy."

me of an Englishman that I was very fond of, who, every time he was unfaithful to his wife, made a notch on his stick. At the end of three months it was no longer a stick, it was a saw ! ”

“ In fact you have had a good many lovers, to console you. ”

“ Good Lord, yes. One must be sensible. Men, what are they ? Angels when they want you and devils when they’ve got you. But if one took them seriously, my God, where would you be ! ”

“ A little more rouge on the nails ? ”

“ No. That’ll do. Last winter I had them mauve colour. And a friend said to me : ‘ Your hands remind me of a drowned man’s I saw on the river bank at Bougival. ’ That gave me the shivers, so I changed the colour. ”

“ Tell me, are you very much in love with your friend ? ”

“ André ? Oh, he’s sweet. I don’t pretend to say that I am Dédé’s first adventure. But the poor boy is an invalid and he wants someone to hold his hand. ”

“ He loves you ? ”

“ Ah ! yes. He’s mad about me. At making love he is very good. Another rub with the polisher on my left thumb nail. ”

“ There, Mademoiselle. It’s done. ”

“ How much do I owe you ? ”

“ Twenty francs, Mademoiselle. ”

“ There you are, twenty-five. By the way, what is your name ? ”

“ Mlle. Marguerite. If you want me tell the porter. ”

"I shall do that, sure You've done my hands very well I shall recommend you to my boy"

"Oh! I prefer not to manicure men"

"Men! What was I saying? Pigs, the whole bang shoot Au revoir, Mademoiselle Marguerite."

Nadia went out She gave the case back to the manicurist, who was reading *le Sourire* in the hall of the hotel, and said

"Here you are, Mademoiselle Many thanks And when your client in 241 asks for you, telephone to me at once, to this number Number 12, Plessis Breau, Indre-et Loire"

Madame Brennoy had spent part of the day with her son. As soon as he had gone she called Nadia and, anxious to know the result of her inquiry, she asked

"Well, my dear? Did you find out anything at Tours?"

"Yes Fortune favoured me. To begin with, as we suspected, the Bavarian student has skirts She's a red haired woman named Gaby Monthel and occupies a room next to Monsieur Andre's"

"What do you think of that! A red haired woman There are no children, these days! And were you able to find out anything about this person?"

"I spent three-quarters of an hour tête-a-tête with her I learnt all I wanted to know"

Madame Brennoy did not conceal her amazement.

"What! Nadia. You have managed to "

Nadia did not mention the subterfuge she had

used, but told, in her own way, what had occurred at the hotel ; and when she had finished her story, she ended up in a serious manner :

"Now, Pauline, may I speak to you freely, like a friend ?"

"Do please, I beg of you."

"Well, if I were in your place, I should be very concerned about this business. You must face the facts. . . . The truth is, Monsieur André has a liaison with a very unsatisfactory woman who, if things go on like this, might become dangerous."

"How do you mean ?"

"First of all, this Gaby Monthel is a *grue* who appears on the music halls. With shameless audacity she enumerated her successive lovers. She has your son on a string and only wants his money."

"Oh !"

"Money, that wouldn't matter so much, but it is Monsieur André's health which must naturally give you cause for anxiety. Don't you think he runs a great risk, getting mixed up with a girl who is anybody's money ?"

"Quite true. You think of everything, Nadia."

"You see, a woman like that, who picks men up in the corridor of a train, is not the sort of mistress that a mother can have confidence in. When you remember that Monsieur André met her at Geneva only a day or two ago and that the very same night they shared a sleeping compartment !"

"You frighten me, Nadia I had not thought of that. The little joke about the Bavarian student is more serious than I imagined"

"I should like you to have been present, without being seen, at my interview with this Gaby. You would have been shocked at her callousness. She is a regular woman of the streets in every sense of the word, who get men into their clutches, pretend to love them in order to take advantage of their generosity. She received me, almost naked. And, I forgot to tell you, she had a little box of cocaine on the table beside her bed. I swear to you that if I had known that a son of mine was under the influence of a creature like that I should have left the hotel heartbroken"

Madame Brennoy listened attentively to what Nadia had said. She no longer treated it lightly. She paced up and down her boudoir growing more and more agitated.

"My dear, I am deeply grateful to you for speaking so frankly. You are right. This must not go on. There is my son's health to consider. I am determined to act straight away"

Nadia looked up, alarmed.

"Act? What do you mean to do?"

"It's quite simple. I shall tell Andre point blank that I know all about his affair, without mentioning your name, of course! I will explain to him what a risk he is taking with that girl. I will make him understand."

A gesture from Nadia interrupted Madame Brennoy, who, stopping suddenly in front of her, asked

"What? Don't you think that plain speaking will be sufficient for André?"

"No! No! Pauline. You are making a mistake. Let me tell you what will happen after your remonstrances. Your son, for peace and quiet's sake, will promise not to see this Gaby, and their liaison will go on surreptitiously. The lectures of a mother or a father have never turned a son from his amours. Do you know what Monsieur André will say to you? That Gaby is an honest young girl; that someone has maligned her; that she has never asked him for a sou; that she is perfectly nice and that your fears are needless, and the same evening he will go back and throw himself into her arms."

"But what then, Nadia?"

"I have thought it out on my way from Tours. In my opinion there is one definite solution which probably would dispel all danger."

"What is that?"

"Do you think twenty-five thousand francs would be too great a price to pay for Monsieur André's well being, moral and physical?"

"I would give more if I was sure that . . ."

"Very well, leave it to me. Give me the money in bank notes and I will tell you in a little time if I have succeeded. Only, I want to be sure that Monsieur André will keep away from Tours for a long enough time for me to act."

"The day after to-morrow we are both invited to our friends the Brezillacs at the Château de Charzé. André will be with me all day."

"Then I will take advantage of it. Give me *carte blanche*."

"My darling Nadia, how well you understand the anxieties of a worried mother!"

"Isn't it natural? All I ask of you is not to breathe a word of what I am doing."

"Do you take me for a child? André would have a grudge against you and I should be very grieved if he did not get to like you."

The butler came to say that dinner was ready. Nadia got up. Madame Brennoy led her into the dining-room, taking her by the arm in a very friendly manner. As they passed through the hall, where a splendid still-life by Oudry and two autumn landscapes by Théodore Rousseau hung, she whispered.

"My dear, you are like a father to André. It is the business of a father to remove dangerous women from his son's life."

"Hush! Pauline. Don't speak about it. If Monsieur André suspected me, he would insist upon my being sent away there and then."

VI

MADAME BRENNON, wearing a light coloured gown, came on to the terrace with her companion.

"Come, my dear. It is time I introduced you to André."

"You think so?"

"Yes, certainly—come, come along."

André stood up when he saw the two women. He kissed his mother and bowed to Nadia.

"My dear, let me introduce you to Countess Brasiloff, my companion, my right hand, my friend. . . ."

"My congratulations, Madame. You have won my mother's heart, for as a rule, she is not very complimentary to people."

"Monsieur André, who could possibly help being devoted to Madame, your mother!"

The young man looked at Nadia with curiosity, whilst she pretended not to see him, entirely pre-occupied by Madame Brennon's conversation. With the freedom of youth and the boldness of a spoilt child, he remarked:

"I say, mother! I thought you had an old duenna for a companion; you know, one of those scraggy, angular women that you read about in books. Splendid, Madame, you will cheer up the old place!"

Nadia smiled, and dropping her eyes:

"Thank you, Monsieur Andre"

"An old duenna!" Madame Brennoy repeated jokingly "Look at Nadia! Isn't she worthy of being a maid of honour to an Empress? Oh! what a nuisance I have forgotten my keys Go and find them for me You know, on my dressing table, on the right And look and see if I put out my spirit lamp in the bath room at the same time"

"At once, Pauline"

Nadia went off with studied grace as she walked She felt that André was looking at her He came up to his mother and remarked with surprise.

"She calls you Pauline?"

"Yes I asked her to She has become a real friend, so kind, so thoughtful, so well-bred"

"She's certainly all right, your duenna"

"Take care, André, be nice with her You see she is not an ordinary paid companion Treat her as you would anyone who is devotedly fond of your mother"

"Very well, mother"

Nadia came back Andre went off to look after his car Madame Brennoy whispered to Nadia?

"You understand After lunch tell Louis to take you to Tours Do all you can We shall not be back before ten o'clock this evening"

"Rest assured, I will do everything possible, even impossible, to put things right"

At two o'clock Madame Brennoy's car pulled up at the Town Hall at Tours Nadia got out,

went into a café to telephone to the *Hotel de l'Univers* :

"I want to speak to Mlle. Gaby Monthel. Is she in her room? Good. Will you tell her that it is Mlle. Marguerite."

Nadia heard Gaby's voice, she replied :

"Who is that. Mlle. Marguerite?"

"Yes, it's me, Mademoiselle The manicurist, the other day, you remember?"

"Ah! yes. But I did not send for you."

"No! no! That's so. I want to see you about something which may interest you."

"What is it?"

"I would rather speak to you privately. Can I see you now?"

"Yes! Come up! You've struck a good time. I'm bored stiff!"

Nadia put up the receiver and went to the hotel. She knocked at room 241. Mlle. Gaby Monthel was still in bed, smoking a cigarette and thinking of nothing. She smiled at her visitor.

"Nothing doing, as regards my hands, I'm sorry to say."

"Oh! I have not come for that, but to put a very fine proposition before you."

"A fine proposition! Well, sit down! Take two chairs. And two cigarettes, one in each hand!"

"No, thank you. Your cigarettes are too strong."

Nadia installed herself by the bed. Gaby leaning with her elbow on her pillow, gazed at her in keen anticipation :

"If you are looking for a job, it's a bad egg
Funds are too low"

"Just listen, Mademoiselle. Do you believe
in coincidences?"

"Yes, rather! I should think I do. The
evening I first made a side slip in the Bois de
Vincennes it rained cats and dogs, and I got my
dress done in. Bad luck never comes singly
does it?"

"Well, just think of it, I have been manicuring
a lady who is in a way, connected with you.
At least I gather so from what I understood on my
first visit."

"A lady who is"

"Yes, she lives ten kilometres away"

"I don't know anybody in Touraine"

"When I say that she is in a way connected with
you, I mean indirectly. As a matter of fact you
don't know her. And she has never seen you either."

"Oh! A regular mystery story"

Nadia leaned over the bed and whispered
confidentially

"The fact is, it is your boy friend's mother"

Gaby bent forward to Nadia. She was extremely
interested.

"Dédé's mother? That's killing!"

There was a silence. Nadia added in con-
firmation

"Yes. Monsieur André's mother"

Gaby burst out laughing. She kicked up her
legs under the bedclothes and banged the pillow.
Then, smiling at the unexpected revelation, she
roared with laughter again.

"Joking apart! That beats the band. Isn't the world small; it's amazing!"

"Ah, yes—it is really the cause of my unexpected visit."

"I don't know what on earth you're talking about."

"I will tell you, Mademoiselle. Listen seriously a minute."

"Go right ahead."

"This is it. When I came the other day I never had the slightest idea that you were staying here with my client's son. The next day I went as usual to Madame Brennoy's house to do her hands. I found her very worried and upset; she did not, in fact, seem herself at all. As she always tells me everything, I asked her what was the matter. She said: 'My dear, I am very anxious about André. The boy is having an affair with a young artiste.'"

"But how on earth did she know?"

"Ah! That I can't tell you, Mademoiselle. Anyway, she is quite aware of everything. About your meeting in Geneva; that you are staying here, and how crazy her son is about you, etc. Let me go on. She confided to me: 'I am extremely sorry to see André start a liaison with this young woman as he is so soon going to be engaged to the daughter of one of our friends. And, you see, it will be very disagreeable for everybody.'"

"André is engaged?"

"Yes—almost."

"Deceitful devil! He's never breathed a word of it to me."

"Men are all the same, Mademoiselle"

"Yes! That's what I told him the other day, pigs, every man jack of 'em!"

"And so Madame Breunoy, frightfully upset, whilst I was finishing her nails, bemoaned and carried on. Suddenly she exclaimed 'After all, what is there to prevent me going to Tours and finding the lady and begging her to leave my son alone!' When I heard that I pricked up my ears and said 'At Tours? Does she happen to be called Gaby—at the *Hotel de l'Univers*?'"

"Why, yes—Gaby Monthel"

"But, Madame, she is one of my nicest clients. A charming lady, so well brought up, and so refined."

"You said that to her? Oh! What a scream!"

"Absolutely. And whilst your friend's mother was getting excited, I weighed it all up. And I thought, this is a very simple business. Why let it end in a scandal, with dramatic scenes and tears when these ladies can so easily fix matters up? At that moment I had a brain wave, a ladylike solution. Allow me. May I ask you an indiscreet question, Mademoiselle. Are you very much in love with Monsieur André?"

"Oh! I'm fond of him all right. Of course, I wouldn't go on my hands and knees to Marseilles after him, but at any rate."

"That is to say, you have a little bit of a hunch for him, but if one day you had to separate, you would not take a dose of laudanum."

"You make me laugh! Men have sometimes cost me a couple of aspirins because they

have got on my nerves. But as to poisoning myself!"

"Exactly, just as I thought. I did the right thing in suggesting my solution to Madame Brennoy. What would you say, Mademoiselle, if your friend's mother offered you ten thousand francs not to see her son again?"

"My word, that's an idea."

"Maybe. But suppose you refuse, and your liaison, with Monsieur André still goes on. What will happen? His mother will stop his allowance. How will you two manage without any money? Do you intend to keep him?"

Gaby glanced ironically at Nadia:

"You can't have looked at me. Do you think I look like a good old has-been who pays gigolos?"

"Certainly not. So my idea is not bad. You touch the money. Disappear. Heigh presto!"

"How much did you say?"

"Ten thousand francs. It is generous, isn't it?"

Gaby seemed perplexed:

"I'm worth quite that."

"I entirely agree with you. But your friend's mother is very miserly and it was I who suggested ten. She mentioned five."

"Did she? Why not a book of stamps and my return ticket, third class!"

"Forgive me, I suppose I ought not to offer an opinion. But if I were in your place I should accept. Considering that your adventure has lasted four days you will have got two thousand five hundred francs a day. It's a star's salary."

the porter, and then catch the five-twenty train."

"Anyhow, it would be a rotten trick to chuck him over without a word, poor boy. He's been jolly decent to me."

"Of course you can't. You must write him a nice little farewell note."

"What can I say to him? You know I hardly ever write a letter. It always gives me a headache."

"I'll dictate it for you. Go on. Begin like this : *My darling. . . .*"

"Suppose I begin *My little darling*. That sounds better, doesn't it, eh?"

"Yes. *My little darling, I'm awfully upset.*"

"Half a minute, upset. Let's see, are there two p's in upset?"

"One p and one t. *I've just had a wire. On your account I chucked an old friend of mine in Paris. He is in a terrible state.*"

"One r and two b's in terrible?"

"No, two r's and one b."

"What a horrible word to spell. *He's terribly upset . . . and . . .*"

"*that I have left him, and he threatens to commit suicide.*"

"That's a good 'un!"

"Don't worry, get on with it. *My duty is to go back to him. Good-bye! André, my darling.*"

"*My great, big darling.* That sounds better."

"But you wrote : *my little darling* at the beginning of the letter."

"But I prefer it like that. I'm very sad at having to give him up."

André, freed from this little *grue*, would come and live at the château with his mother and her companion, who felt that she was quite capable of making him forget his monetary love affair begun in a sleeping car. Wrecked and defenceless on a lonely rock where the siren lay in wait for him, he would be under the daily spell of her fascinating voice, her glances and her attitudes.

The purring of the motor soothed Nadia's pleasant reflections. Life seemed sweet. Why grumble at her lot, when, with intelligence and perseverance, she could win charming smiles and solacing favours?

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the five thousand francs that we still owe her. And the whole business will be a thing of the past. It will only have cost you ten thousand francs."

"Very clever of you to give her only five thousand straight away and to keep her up to her promise with the remainder."

"Naturally. One must encourage people to keep their word."

"You are very wise, Nadia."

"No, but I know something of human nature."

"And to show my gratitude, you will keep five thousand more for yourself."

"Oh! Pauline!"

The chauffeur had unloaded the luggage. Whilst Madame Brennoy dressed herself for luncheon, André, with nothing to do, a little out of his element at the château in which he had not lived for a long time, walked up and down in front of the windows of the large drawing-room.

Nadia went up to him. She asked him, sympathetically.

"You seem rather tired, Monsieur André. I hope you are not ill?"

André stopped, and with studied and rather distant politeness:

"Madame la comtesse, thank you. I am quite all right."

"I am afraid you feel worried about the departure of your friend."

"Indeed I do. You know what it is. Down there in Switzerland we live the lives of monks. One gets attached to one's friends, com-

adventures a romantic air. Again, it was also his father who was showing himself.

His fair hair, rather long, brushed back, his pale face, regular features, his straight nose, sensuous mouth, eyes with dark rings round them, owing to his complaint, all gave the impression that he was born a century too late, in a world thrown off its balance by Hertzian waves, compulsory education and universal suffrage. André was not built for the blazer, plus fours, open necked shirt and cloth caps. A trifle effeminate in appearance, an air of elegance, never commonplace, his fine hands seemed suited to the frock coat of Musset and de Vigny days, the tie folded three times round the collar and dove coloured or pearl grey trousers touching pointed shoes.

Grandpa Brennoy had been a silk merchant at Lyons. André's father, who had added to his fortune by marrying Pauline, had studied at the Chartes school and had passed all his Law examinations. But being rich and independent he had achieved nothing. Between *jus gentium*, of which he knew little, and the study of the piano, on which he vamped fairly well, he could never make up his mind what profession to adopt.

Who will ever be able to explain the laws of atavism which cause genius to shine in the top story and cover up the vulgarity of nature with jewels of great price? Who will be able to compound in its exact proportions the mixture of hereditary traits in the child, the paternal and maternal qualities of each, their weaknesses, their likings, their vices and their talents?

He was looking at the news reel, sitting next to a friend, a student from the atelier. Suddenly, while the screen was showing the Minister for the Colonies opening the Madagascan picture gallery, his friend whispered in his ear :

"Do you know what I was doing? I was opening up a friendship with my neighbour on my left!"

The same evening in a cabaret in Montparnasse, Mademoiselle Maud, sitting between her two friends, exclaimed with sincerity :

"I really don't know which of you two I like the better. I love you both!"

"Very well, toss for us."

"Right ho! Give me a two franc piece."

Luck favoured André. The idyll did not last long. One day he met Maud with a great thick-lipped, bald-headed, rough looking man. He reproached her bitterly. She replied logically :

"What about it! Do you suppose I can live on my twelve hundred francs a month! That fellow is a pearl broker. He has bags of money. I am beginning my necklace of pearls, my boy!"

André broke off with her there and then. His first disillusion regarding love. He had others. A middle-aged society woman fell for him, when she met him at an 'At Home.' She was not very handsome, but very passionate. She adored his sonnets. He was happy. But, one day, dancing with her in a Russian cabaret, he was tackled in the cloak-room by two well-dressed gentlemen, who remarked without any hesitation :

"Look here! You have robbed us of the

one will pay dearly for the deceitfulness of the others."

He slashed, with a branch he had cut, the leaves within his reach. Really, he had been too silly. Romance, in our days! Ah! well. In future he will exclaim like the wise man: 'I'll make game of everyone who makes game of me!'

The gong sounded. It was lunch time. He turned round, made a last slash with his broken branch and cut the grass to mark his resolve.

parties and tennis parties, and at these merry gatherings André was a very welcome guest.

One afternoon, at tea time, the butler told Madame Brennoy that Monsieur André wished to remain in his room. She beckoned Nadia and said to her confidentially :

“Will you do me a favour? Take André’s tea and talk to him a little. Perhaps he will unburden himself to you. His behaviour is beginning to worry me.”

Nadia was only waiting for this opportunity. She had been sent to André by his mother. That was a safeguard. With great eagerness she prepared the tray and went up to the first floor. It was a large room with three windows. Old beams painted royal blue decorated the ceiling. The mantelpiece in Renaissance style still bore the arms of the Counts of Foneviell, the former owner of Plessis-Bréau. Armchairs with Aubusson tapestry on their high backs stood on either side of the canopied bed. Nadia found André lying on a couch. A book was open on his knees. But he was not reading. He was on the point of getting up, but she prevented him with a smiling gesture :

“Your mother has begged me to bring you your tea, Monsieur André, as you do not wish to take it with us.”

“Thank you, Madame. Would you mind putting it down there.”

Nadia, with extreme affability, brought a small table and put the tea things close to him.

He looked at her with frigid indifference.

not pretend to be surprised. I know what I'm talking about—Since her departure I have had the curiosity to make some enquiries there. I have learnt some very curious facts. With money, as you know as well as I do, one can make people speak. I have found out that during my absence, the very day of her departure, Gaby had a visit from a dark woman, who accompanied her to the station in the hotel omnibus. The porter remembers it very well. I have also questioned all those who came in contact with Gaby. Amongst others Mademoiselle Marguerite, a manicurist. She has sworn to me that a dark lady exactly resembling yourself borrowed her things for half-an-hour or more in order to have a tête-à-tête with her client. I am certain that it is you who schemed all this."

"Monsieur André. How can you suggest! . . ."

"Be quiet. Will you come to the *Univers* and let me confront you with the porter who will recognise you immediately?"

"Monsieur! You surely do not imagine I should put myself in the hands of these people. For money they will say anything!"

"Ah! You know very well that you would be found out!"

"My dignity does not allow me!"

"Your dignity! It is less than that of a chamber-maid, who, at any rate, does not meddle with what does not concern her. Your dignity!"

André's anger increased with every word he spoke.

"Is it your dignity that makes you wink at me

ill. And I beg you to leave me alone. Please, please, leave me alone. Don't ask me anything more, please. I want to be alone, alone."

Madame Brennoy saw that by insisting she would only exasperate him still more. She withdrew. Mystified, she returned to her room. Nadia was not there, nor in the large drawing-room. She went up to the second floor and found her bending over an opened travelling trunk.

She exclaimed :

"Nadia! You are mad!"

"I wish to leave, Madame. I am hurt. I cannot stay any longer in your service."

"But what is it all about?"

"I cannot be the butt of your son's ill-temper. He has really exceeded the limit."

"Tell me, what happened?"

"You begged me to take the tea up to him, didn't you? It was not of my own will that I went to his room."

"Oh no, no—and so?"

"And so your son, doubtless extremely annoyed at being disturbed in his meditation over his lost love, received me like a dog. I tried to be affable. And do you know what he threw up in my face? He said, 'I've had enough of your attitude-inising, your oglings and your excessive affability . . . ' My oglings! Isn't it true that I have never indulged in the slightest familiarity with him? Monsieur André must be out of his mind to imagine such things!"

"Come, Nadia. Come, listen! You are a sensible woman, you are taking the foolishness

I want to give you. Come and see if you like the colour."

"Pauline, you are too kind."

"No, oh no! Come along. By the way, I have no more biscuits or malaga in my room. Will you see to it. And also, you have told Amelie to take off a blanket. I was quite cold last night. Tell her to put it half way up, do you see? Just half way up."

"I won't forget, Pauline."

"And now, don't let me ever see that trunk again—see!"

"I promise."

The two women went out of the room. Peace reigned again in the house. Madame Brennoy had re-assumed her authority, the queenly bearing of a Juno a little too portly. Suddenly she stopped in the gallery, and knitting her brows, she remarked:

"By the way, my dear, I was glancing over your accounts this morning. Another ten francs for fly papers for the servants' quarters. They are absurdly extravagant down there!"

"There are a great many flies in the kitchen, you know."

"Maybe there are. But really they needn't waste fly-paper like that. Ten francs! Ten francs!"

Three days later Nadia took her place again in the dining-room. Peace certainly reigned at Plessis-Bréau; but it was a peace that foretold no good. Except during the meals, when André passed the usual polite formalities with Nadia, he never spoke

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but I have some letters that I must write. I am going into the library'

Nadia watched him go out. Immovable, she looked him up and down. A look of bitter sarcasm lit up her face. She seemed to say :

"Carry on, carry on, young man ! We shall see which of us will have the last word. I have cracked tougher nuts than you, more experienced ones, more stubborn and more blasé. You will perhaps pay dear, one of these days, for the scornful treatment that you are meting out to me ! "

"Think of your health, my dear boy. It is improving, thank God. But you know very well that if you step over the traces, if you run after women as, may be, your friends who are healthy and strong do, it would be disastrous."

"Oh! You are looking on the dark side. You are a pessimist, mother."

"Alas, my dear, it is a mother's heart which makes me anxious. Come, think a little. If you met a girl you liked, why shouldn't you marry?"

"I should have to have a terrible crush on her."

"Well, why shouldn't you find this rare bird? Let me try and find her for you."

"Who have you asked to the party?"

"First, there is the Marquis de Morèze."

"As a likely young girl to marry, he is somewhat impossible!"

"I have asked him because he will bring his niece, Miss Dorothy Lawson. You must tell me what you think of her. I am on good terms with Morèze as I've given him some useful tips on the Bourse. Then there is Lucien Le Perquier and his sister Rolande, twenty-four, and a divorcée. A very clever young woman, married to a stupid fool who deceived her with the housemaid. Divorced after six months. Then again, we shall have among the pretty women Madame d'Hauterive. Thirty-five. A little too old for you. But a very pleasant person, a widow, who nursed her sick husband for several years. As you will see, fair and rather well covered."

"You mean a regular tub."

"No! No! Merely slightly plump. A charming

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"No! No! Merely slightly plump. A charming

woman She has often asked after you In spite of being twelve years older than you, she would perhaps be your ideal Beware of young girls of twenty, André—the type whom I call ‘Me first, everybody else unplaced’ You have to fuss and spoil them and think only of their silly whims and fancies They know nothing of life, poor dears Everything is their due A shower of roses at every step Ah! I forgot! I have invited little Odette Maulleron, a medical student, daughter of the Maullerons of Angers She is most amusing Ought to have been a boy”

“A good woman spoilt?”

“Not at all Very advanced, but pretty She would know how to look after you at any rate A future doctor”

“Yes Her love letters would be like prescriptions Every morning, on an empty stomach, one dessert spoonful of kisses And every night she would take your temperature before she put her arms round you”

“You are impossible, André!”

“Ah! mother, I am trying to see the funny side of things By the way, will your companion be at this reception?”

“Why yes”

“I felt sure she would She is your great friend”

“Dédé! Don’t begin all that over again She will be there of course She will help me to receive the guests, as is natural I have even invited someone for whom she has a liking”

"Who is that?"

"An officer in a native regiment at Suamur. Captain de Brégéac. A nice fellow, who, unless I am much mistaken, is having a serious flirtation with her."

"Ha ha! You are interested in your lady attendant's conquests!"

"That's quite natural."

"And you allow it?"

"Well! Plessis-Bréau is not a convent. I could not reasonably refuse a little diversion to Nadia, who is ready to bury herself here for six months of the year. Besides Brégéac is not the only one she attracts. There is Molinat, the chocolate manufacturer in Vendome, who is greatly taken with her. One day he said to me: 'Dear friend, if ever you have no further need of Nadia, send her to me. I will take her as nursery-governess to my children. I should then have her under my eye.' And, oh, I forgot old doctor Toulmont, who has from time to time written lurid letters to her. We read them together and die with laughter. It is most amusing."

"In fact, she is greatly in demand, your Nadia?"

"Yes, indeed. And I personally don't see any harm in it. It all goes to show that she is attractive, pleasant and good company, and that I haven't been mistaken in making a close friend of her."

"Ah well, so much the better. But I'll tell you one thing, mother, which will not surprise you. If this woman and myself were the sole survivors of a world-wide cataclasm and we were left together

on a desert island, I warrant you that the human race would become extinct ! ”

The courtyard of the château at Plessis Bréau was turned into a garage. There were luxurious cars and out-of-date limousines with tiny bonnets driven by old gardeners disguised as chauffeurs. The cars were parked in rows one behind the other revealing the social position of their owners.

The lawn under the lime trees was turned into a salon. The laughter and conversation of Madame Brennoy's guests, standing by the buffet, vied with the rhythm of a jazz band from Paris. There was dancing in the large drawing room. Its French windows opened on to the terrace. There were bridge parties under the shade of the plane trees. Little flirtations were going on in the plantations. There was gossiping everywhere. The big wigs of the neighbourhood, the last arrivals, talked over the events of the season.

“ Have you seen Morèze ? He looks astonishingly well since his divorce ”

“ I was told that the Marquise was too much for him. A regular high flyer, you know ! Hot blooded, fiery eye. They used to call her, at the cavalry barracks, the big jump ”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because all the officers fell for her ”

“ Root Morèze ! And to think he has ten stag's horns in his coat of arms ! ”

“ Ah well, with the two on his head that makes a dozen ”

“ Have you seen little Dorothy Lawson ? ”

"Yes, you mean that charming London girl?"

"I shouldn't mind learning how to pronounce 'th' in English with her."

"How?"

"That I'll leave you to guess."

"Young Brennoy, that tall fair fellow, looks very bored over there."

"Yes, poor chap. He's just come from a sanatorium. His health is not too good."

"Hard lines to get that trouble at twenty-three."

"Anyway he can afford to take care of himself."

"How much is old Mother Brennoy worth?"

"More than forty million francs. And she does things top hole. Have you seen the buffet! Enough to feed a regiment. And the Heidsieck Monopole 1904 flows like water."

"Well, I'll stand a round of cocktails to anybody who can tell me the exact position of the Russian lady in the house."

"Which Russian lady?"

"This Countess Brasiloff. The lady companion. Don't you think she's a little too good looking, too striking, for an ordinary lady's companion?"

"That's true! What, do you suspect Pauline of having read the Songs of Bilitis lately?"

"What an idea! No. But this young man who lives alone with his mother and this lady. Eh! What!"

"Oh! André, do you think he sleeps with the Russian?"

"Did you ever know him to have had a liaison?"

"Not one."

"You know that invalids of his description are not remarkable for their abstinence"

"That's true I had not thought of that The other day, at the Dreux Bressan's, they happened to be talking of the Russian, and Horiense said to me that it couldn't be very pleasant to be at the mercy of Mother Brennoy's caprices A poisonous person it seems Fussy—domineering—an altogether terrible "

"Look out, here's her son coming No, he is turning the other way Go on"

"Then Emile de Breux Bressan asked how a pretty young woman like that could put up with it Now I understand! The son makes up for the mother"

"Especially as the mother can pay the lady to amuse her son A little extra every month for reading to him at night That's better than letting him pick up with any thing!"

"Very immoral!"

"Not at all Very hygienic. I once knew an old lawyer in the country who chose his clerk to suit his wife He preferred to do that rather than let his wife create a scandal in the town And so she passed for the most virtuous woman in Périgueux."

In order to please his mother, André had chatted in turn to Miss Lawson, whom he had found as insipid as a stale pickle, to Madame Rolande Le Perquier, the young divorcée, who, having nothing in life to learn, had taught him quite a lot, to Mademoiselle Odette Mulleron who, in order to

exhibit her medical knowledge had for a quarter of an hour, discussed the methods of treatment in vogue at Dr. Schwer's sanatorium, and last of all to Madame d'Hauterive, tender as a nurse, with a purring voice and the perfervid gestures of a deaconess.

While he was talking to Monsieur Molinat, Aunt Berthe came and asked him :

"Do you know where Nadia is ?"

"I've no idea, aunt. Do you particularly want her ?"

"No, I don't. It is your mother who is not very well. She can't find her and Nadia knows where her cachets are."

"Half-a-minute. I'll go and look for her."

André wandered from group to group. He could not find Nadia either in the drawing-room or at the buffet or on the lawns. He looked among the bridge players. The library. In vain. He came across his mother, who, impatiently asked him :

"Where on earth is Nadia ? She is really most tiresome. Here I've been a quarter-of-an-hour waiting for her."

"I'll try and find her, mother."

André started off again in search. He went under the trees that led to the central avenue, and at last saw Nadia sitting on a garden seat with Captain de Brégeac. They were joking. He could hear their laughter.

He went up to them and said :

"Excuse me, Captain, spoiling your tête-à-tête, but may I say a word to my mother's companion ?"

He had deliberately chosen this humiliating phraseology. Nadia looked up at him, questioningly :

"What do you want to say to me, Monsieur?"

"Merely that my mother has been waiting for you for a quarter-of-an-hour. I am sorry to remind you in public that you are in her service, Madame."

Nadia rose abruptly. Flushing with anger, she was about to reply, but she decided to say nothing. She went off. Captain Brégeac looked at André. It was on the tip of his tongue to say something scathing, without mincing matters. He got up. Then changing his mind he remarked sarcastically.

"Monsieur, allow me to tell you that you have a very cavalier way of speaking to women!"

"And in turn may I be permitted to remark that that lady is not a guest. She has duties to fulfil here. She is paid to do them. And I have politely reminded her of the fact."

"You say politely. Brutally would be more exact."

"Your interference is uncalled for, Captain, and I speak as I have a right, to persons who are in our employ."

"Monsieur, you may think what you like about my interference. Out of regard for Madame, your mother, I will say no more."

"You are too kind!"

"I am her guest. But if I hear you speak to Countess Brasiloff in that manner, away from here, I will teach you to treat this lady, whom I respect, with proper deference."

André moved towards the château. The final remark made him turn on his heel. He looked the officer up and down, and with studied sarcasm answered :

“ You will not meet me outside these grounds with my mother’s companion. I am not in the habit of paying attentions to those in my employ.”

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Madame Brennoy had spoken the truth when she had given her son the names of the men who were interested in Nadia. But neither Dr. Toulmont, nor Molinat, the chocolate manufacturer, had the slightest chance.

The doctor was old enough to be her grandfather. As for Molinat, the rich manufacturer, he would have satisfied the unscrupulous ambition of this Russian refugee if he had not been married and the father of five children. He would never consent to get divorced on her account and offer her, as she wanted, his name and fortune. To be relegated to the position of a mistress, to live a precarious life at the mercy of a fickle man, who had already contracted seven notorious liaisons in ten years ? No. It would be wiser to wait for a more suitable proposal.

There was also Captain Brégeac : thirty-five years old, a fine athlete and a good horseman. Brégeac had attracted her from the very first. She liked his dashing and devil-may-care manner, and his risky humour. He appealed to her physically, he was her ideal lover. Unfortunately, he was poor. He had said to her : I’ve only my pay

to live on " Then Nadia had thought things out And her intelligence told her

" Take care ! Brégeac is an ideal lover for a rich woman If you follow the dictates of your desire, what will happen ? You will live together in poverty Your love will be degraded by the practical realities of life When your position is assured you may indulge in this luxury Not before "

Nadia was far too calculating not to obey the logical conclusions of pure reason For some time she had listened with delight to de Brégeac's declarations of love Now she must forego this enjoyment She had a part to play Sentimentalism must be put aside

Strange fate hangs over two beings sleeping in rooms separated by a Louis Seize ceiling The chit-chat of the guests is stilled on the shady lawns !

The mother is sleeping in her historic bed, snoring in three time on two bastiste pillows edged with lace , the mother sleeps happy and confident while her son lies awake reviewing the day's happenings He is thinking of her whom he has humiliated before her good looking admirer, fascinated by her beauty He remembers the very words he rapped out to this insolent fellow He imagines with infinite satisfaction Nadia's secret rage at being called to order in his presence, humiliated in her *amour propre*, wishing to appear more important than she was He tries to read his book, but in spite of his efforts his thoughts get the better of him Nadia keeps coming into his mind The

picture of her is continually returning and fanning the flame of his aversion.

Aversion, certainly ! However, this evening a new feature enters into his aversion. Hitherto André has never looked upon his mother's companion as a real woman. A sort of upper servant who had been sexless, that's how she had appeared to him. But, during the garden party he noticed that she had many admirers. The Marquis de Morèze was not above speaking in very complimentary terms of her. Molinat, waited on her at the buffet offering her cake, champagne and cigarettes. He had seen with his own eyes (not to mention the cavalry officer too ready to play the part of Don Quixote) that many men had paid attentions to this Russian, with her supple figure and langorous eyes, and her mysterious past.

What mental aberration on the part of all these people ! What lack of taste ! What charm can they discover in the woman ? Evidently, she is not too unattractive. This afternoon in her white dress and her large velvet hat she made some little impression.

André shut his eyes. Suddenly the picture of Gaby, at the hotel, in yellow silk pyjamas, Gaby's laughing, tender, roughishness comes into his mind. Then he opens his eyes, looks at the ceiling, as if he were able to see Nadia up there in her room and, with malicious delight, he thinks :

“ Anyway, I punished her this afternoon ! ”

X

THE butler came into the small sitting-room with a card on a tray. Madame Brennoy was looking through the gardener's accounts with Nadia.

"What is it, Edgar?"

"This gentleman wishes to speak to Madame."
Madame Brennoy read the card.

DOCTOR L. SCHWER

She turned with surprise to Nadia and said:

"Doctor Schwer? Why, he is the head of the Sanatorium. Show him in, Edgar."

Madame Brennoy powdered herself quickly while Nadia put the bills into a drawer. Doctor Schwer came in. A man of about sixty with a white pointed beard, well dressed, reminding one of a diplomat rather than a doctor. After the usual formalities, he changed his tone and began:

"Madame, being in France I took this opportunity of calling upon you, and if I may say so, I must like to speak to you confidentially about at eight."

"You doctor looked at Nadia. It was evident and mysterious. I talk to Madame Brennoy alone taken. It is France in his case efforts to mind leaving us for a few of the inexorable keeps on. Madame, be br."

"Certainly, Pauline."

She went out. The doctor waited until the door was shut.

"Is your son here, Madame?"

"No, doctor, he has gone to see one of his friends near Langeais."

"Good. Then we shall not be disturbed."

These preliminary remarks alarmed Madame Brennoy:

"I hope you have nothing serious to tell me regarding André's health, doctor?"

The doctor did not reply. He pulled his chair nearer in order to talk more quietly:

"Madame, it is only human kindness to keep patients in ignorance of the gravity of their condition. But although one does not tell it to them, it would be criminal not to be frank about it to their relations."

"Oh, doctor—you frighten me—oh!"

"I beg you, Madame. You are the only person to whom I can tell the truth. It is my duty to speak plainly. I preferred to speak to you personally rather than write to you, after our examination last June. I regret to have to tell you your son's condition is dangerous."

"What do you mean exactly by that?"

"Pneumo-thorax of the left lung has hardly a quarter of it working. There was an attack unfortunately at the last radioscopic examination. The end showed disturbing patches at the summit of the lung base."

In any case, "What does that imply?"

The doctor hesitated. He thought over your son. He told him exactly

why I came, to live a careful life. You understand me don't you? Above all not to live a loose life with women. Extreme moderation is essential. Otherwise with over fatigue, the patient, being in a state of feeble resistance, a fatal result is apt to come unexpectedly."

"I understand, doctor."

"Very good, that is all that I wish to tell you."

Madame Brennoy got up. She leant against the arm chair. She could hardly stand.

"I want to thank you for the great care you have taken of Andre—over there—in Switzerland."

"Alas! Madame, we should like to be able to cure all those who come to us. Science proposes but God disposes."

"You have been very good to him."

"Monsieur André is a charming man. He has everyone's sympathy at the sanatorium. You may be proud to have such an accomplished son."

Tears streamed down Madame Brennoy's cheeks. She listened with infinite sorrow to the doctor's compliments, she felt she was listening to a eulogy on a person who had passed away. It seemed to her in her unutterable grief that Dr. Schwer used the past tense in speaking of Andre. Almost unconsciously, she took the doctor's outstretched hand.

"And naturally, in case of urgent need, your son will return at once to Reysin, won't he, Madame?"

"Yes, doctor."

"Then—*au revoir!* Madame."

"*Au revoir!* doctor."

"By the way! Oh! Forgive me mentioning

it. May I ask your chauffeur to sell me one or two tins of petrol. Would you believe it, my tank is empty ! ”

Madame Brennoy made an effort to pull herself together. She stammered :

“ What. One or two tins. Why, of course. I'll ring for Edgar to take you to the garage.”

The doctor thanked her, bowed and went out. Then Madame Brennoy fell back in her chair. For a long time she wept in the silence of her sitting room, lying back on the cushions, her two hands clutching her moist handkerchief. It was the hour for her biscuits and malaga. For the first time for many years Madame Brennoy did not touch them.

An hour later. A most tragic hour, during which Madame Brennoy, in a state of collapse, kept repeating every word of the fatal diagnosis. The right lung gone. Patches on the left one. The pain, the anguish of a mother's love. The shock. Her egoism suddenly overthrown. How could Fate dare to mark out this calvary for her ! To suffer ! That was good for others. Up to now she had succeeded in pushing aside the thorns from her path. Since the death of her husband, ten years ago, nothing had happened to interfere with her life of luxury, to threaten the even tenor of her indulgent existence which made one think of those dainty padded boxes in pink and blue, in which the beauties of the Empire Period used to keep their trinkets.

She was both terrified and indignant. Something had happened that her wealth was not able

to ward off Death had come to her and said solemnly : " Get ready to suffer like others I have put my black seal on your son I shall demand him soon " Poor Madame Brennoy ! She breathed heavily, overcome, broken ! Her grief was not merely the silent, dull, hopeless mortification of a weeping mother who learns that her son is condemned , it was also the angry mortification of a great spoilt child, to whom, for the first time, she refuses a request, to whom pitiless fate maliciously brings her her portion of tears, terror and alarm

A knock at the door It was Nadia. Madame Brennoy wished to be alone She replied :

" Later, Nadia Leave me, please "

Nadia did not insist She went and gave some orders to the servants She called in vain for the butler, but ended by finding him standing upon a pair of steps in the library

" What are you doing there, Edgar ? "

" I am putting the electric light in order It has fused, Madame Monsieur André told me, before he went out, to see to the lights ; he wants to work here this evening "

The library was a large room in Véronèse green, with endless shelves filled with beautifully bound books It was a wonderful collection . classics, old romances , law and medical dictionaries ; modern novels hardly cut ; a few dusty old books and atlases A huge leather chesterfield stood in front of a bust of Montaigne, between two glass cases of Roman medals and old foreign orders.

For several days André had taken a liking to this library. He loved to spend the evening in its dimly lit silence. He instinctively wandered there and read haphazard a page or two of Keats or Chénier. He scribbled some verses. He watched the black cat awaiting invisible enemies, crouching in the corner of the room. He dreamed.

This evening his mother, having scarcely touched her dinner brought to her in bed, he had dined alone in the dining-room and hastened to retire to the shadow of the marble Montaigne. The evening before he had been reading *Shakespearean Tragedy* by Professor Bradley, and thanks to this learned exposition, he was glad to familiarise himself with those unforgettable characters created by the Great William, the Wotan of a Walhalla inhabited by real people.

Time passed. His *tillenul* was cold in the cup. André, reclining upon the chesterfield, had forgotten the real world. To him, Plessis-Bréau and Touraine slept on this beautiful and soft summer night, his mother, his friends, no one existed any longer. He fancied he was trudging across the moorland amid the raging storm, in a wild country alongside unhappy King Lear, mad, haggard, incoherent, deceived by his favourite daughter Cordelia. He heard the imprecation of the outlaw without a crown, his lamentations uttered to the blinding gale, his vows of vengeance against the injustice of the world. Belkis, the beautiful black cat, regardless of the wanderings of his fevered brain, was curled up on the edge of a shelf in front of the medical dictionaries. Her eyes half closed,

she gazed at him with her two jade green oblique ellipses : the mysterious look of a re-incarnated sorceress, a disturbing gaze which seemed to penetrate into an unknown world, across the frontiers of our three dimensions

Suddenly the door, which led into the hall, opened quietly. A white figure entered the library. André, his back turned, heard nothing. But he saw Belkis open her eyes wide, lift her head and look with curiosity. André turned. He saw Nadia. She was dressed in thin cream silk pyjamas, with a collar of pale yellow satin. She was holding a book that she had borrowed from the book-case containing modern novels.

XI

NADIA, who knew quite well that André was alone at eleven o'clock in the evening, in the library, pretended to be very much surprised.

"Oh! pardon, Monsieur. I came down to put this book back and take another."

"Do, please."

He remained lying on the couch and went on reading. In her bedroom slippers she moved across the thick carpet quite silently into the light with its green shade. Without hurrying she found the place from which she had taken the novel and looked for another. None of those at her hand seemed to please her. She took a pair of short steps and mounted to the top of them. André looked at her discreetly over his book. At that very moment, Nadia, who stretched out her arm to catch a falling volume intentionally opened the coat of her pyjamas. And as she was naked under the cream silk, the coat fell back and exposed her right bosom.

This very unexpected sight, which in spite of his attitude towards her, was very disturbing, aroused André from his meditations. Instantly he forgot the Shakespearean Tragedy, he broke away from the unhappy king, his madmen and his distress and came back to earth—the real world seemed to him to be suddenly under the control of a woman

he detested, but who was none the less fascinating ; a pretty woman in night attire whose tempting *decolleté* was accidentally offered to his gaze

Nadia knew that André had seen what she wished him to see. She put her foot on the edge of a shelf above the steps and pulled herself up once again to take a novel. With consummate clumsiness she surreptitiously pushed over a pile of books, not replaced in the shelves. They fell on her head. She gave a cry of fear, hung with her two hands on to the shelf and caused the steps to fall over. The scene was so well staged that André was compelled to jump up there and then and to take her in his arms to prevent her from falling.

"My God, how clumsy I am !"

"There's no harm done, Madame."

He lowered her gently to the floor. But she had time to put her arms round his neck and let him inhale the delicate perfume with which she had sprayed her hair and see the soft whiteness of her shoulder. Very embarrassed, without looking at him, she hurriedly put back the scattered volumes and murmured

"Thank you, Monsieur."

Perplexed, he watched her. Then he helped her to put them back. There was a silence, one of those silences full of ominous consequences when the chain of future events seem to be forged, one of those silences in which the Fates are making their plans. He had, as a matter of fact, nothing more to say to Nadia. But some hidden prophetic and irresistible force made him add these simple

words: "If it had not been for me you might have broken your leg."

Then Nadia, kneeling on the floor, her arms full of novels in their pale yellow covers, gazed at him in a way she had never done before. With a look of infinite distress in her eyes she replied:

"I should have preferred that."

The answer was so unexpected that André had the curiosity to continue the conversation.

"You would have preferred to have an accident?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Nadia dropped her eyes.

"Because of you."

"Because of me. (André could hardly prevent himself from laughing.) May I say, Madame, that I am at a loss to know what you mean?"

Nadia looked up. Her expression contrasted strangely with André's smiling face. With a serious and sad tone in her voice she said:

"Oh! Monsicur, it is perhaps just as well that you do not understand certain things that have escaped your notice. In fact, it is better so. All I ask is that you let me suffer in silence."

"You—suffer?"

Nadia suddenly got up. With a toss of the head, she threw back her hair. She stood in front of André, and looking straight at him she replied, under her breath:

"Don't you see how I am suffering here on your account? What? It surprises you? It proves that I have been able to hide my feelings.

Listen, Monsieur. Chance has brought us together. We shall probably never again be together as we are to night. So let me tell you once and for all what is in my heart. From to-day we will never speak of it. To morrow I will wear my mask again, and if I shed any tears, you, at any rate, will not see them. You hate me, Monsieur. You have shown me you do. You sent me out of your room when I only came there at your mother's request. You have humiliated me in front of a man who was paying court to me, but who really means nothing to me—I mention that, by the way, though it can be of no interest to you—in fact you have shown me clearly your contempt and your hatred. Ah, well, Monsieur, I make this confession that my undeserved suffering forces from me in spite of myself. Because I spoke to you the other day of my pride, you must realise that one can have very little pride to be able to speak to you like this. So much the worse. Human suffering has its limits. And God knows I never expected to suffer like this on account of a man whose presence has upset my whole life."

Andre's amused smile gradually died away. Nadia's vehemence disconcerted him. He asked himself with amazement what she was driving at. He repeated:

"On account of a man whose presence of whom are you speaking, Madame?"

"Of you. If you had not treated me from the very beginning as a negligible quantity, you would have realised that I had fallen in love with

you from the very first day. But on that account, you ought not to have looked upon me as a house-maid disguised as a lady."

"I never did."

"Oh yes, oh yes. Misfortune has compelled me to fall very low. I know it. And no doubt it is my fault! Is it I who am responsible for the Revolution which has ruined my family, deprived me of servants who used to be in my service, which has exiled me after enduring terrible times that I would not wish anyone to go through, not even you, my enemy? I am an outcast. That is so—but all the outcasts have their hearts. Ah! and so I will tell you everything this evening. You shall at last know the truth about what happened at Tours, a few days after your arrival."

"It was really you who persuaded Gaby to go away?"

"Yes, it was I. And my only excuse is that jealousy made me do it. I felt wretched at thoughts of you staying away from this house to carry on your affair with this woman. It was I, and I alone, who advised your mother to interfere discreetly. She wanted to have her son at the house. And I wanted to feel that you were near me, nearer my poor broken heart. There, Monsieur, now I have told you what I feel. You can understand now why it has been pleasant to be wounded and to submit to physical pain under the same roof as a sister. Men will be satisfied; per-^{seu} seemed long. Under th

have a generous nature, do not revenge themselves on women who suffer "

Nadia spoke these last words in such a soft tone of voice that André could hardly hear them. A world of thoughts rushed through his mind. Nadia's confession was the greatest surprise he had ever had. At the moment he did not know whether he hated her more or if he was ready to forgive her, whether he wanted her to go or take her hand and smile magnanimously. His mind was the scene of a fierce conflict. Should he laugh at her? Should he console her like an indulgent friend and express his regret for having been so harsh? He was undecided.

Nadia put the fallen books on to the shelves. She had her back to him. She was in flimsy garments. Her perfume attracted him. He could see the outline of her supple body, her well shaped arm as she raised it to put back the last book. He seized her by the wrist compelling her to turn round, and speaking seriously

"Madame, I beg your pardon "

Nadia trembled. She made a slight gesture of protestation. He insisted, without releasing her wrist.

"Yes, yes. I realise it. I have behaved disgracefully. You were right to hate me. A man has no right to treat a woman as I have done. Look at me. I beg you, look at me " whom¹at looked down. He went close up to her

"Of you " At you hands the very beginning as a would have realised that eyes full of tears. His

sympathy grew at the sight of her sadness which his cruelty had caused. He drew Nadia towards him and wished to take her in his arms. She repulsed him gently. The lapels of her pyjamas fell back and exposed her bosom. André felt the warmth of her body. He had an overwhelming desire to embrace her, to press her close and kiss the delights that were offered to him. He mastered himself. He drew back :

"You are not angry with me any longer ? "

"No."

"Will you shake hands ? "

"Yes."

He pressed her little outstretched hand in his. Nadia returned the pressure and walked towards the door. He stopped her as she got there.

"We are no longer enemies, Nadia ? "

"No, friends."

"Great friends ? "

"I'll tell you to-morrow evening."

"Where ? "

"Here, when the household is asleep. Good-night, André."

The door closed gently. André stood still. Under the lamp, Montaigne's cynical smile seemed to set the enigma of life at defiance. Belkis the cat was reposing on the back of the couch. A miniature Sphinx in black fur, she looked at André. It would almost seem that she was about to put to him the question on which his life might hang :

"What will to-morrow bring forth ? "

To André, the day seemed long. Under the

pretext of an invitation, he had gone for a drive in his car all the afternoon. By doing so he had escaped the temptation of seeing Nadia. As a matter of fact he had pulled his car up on the side of the road between Saumur and Chinon. He had crossed a willow holt and sat by the edge of a pool, its calm surface between the reeds and the water lilies reflected the blue sky.

Leaning against a tree whose silver leaves shone in the sun like the undersides of roach and dace, he called to mind the incident of the preceding night. His reconciliation with Nadia, that had come so unexpectedly, seemed to him the strangest thing in the world. Only yesterday he hated her, he only wished, in his pride, to wound her. He could see in her an unsympathetic and unpleasant creature, whose voice was disagreeable to his ears. To-day he pictured her quite differently. What invisible artist had been able to perform this metamorphosis? To give to her sullen expression an unexpected sweetness? To this slender figure such a harmonious line? To those cruel lips the appearance of every form of voluptuousness?

A fish chased by a pike, leapt out of the peaceful water. A wasp flew past in a buzzing spiral. A breath of wind suddenly brought a ripple to the still water and caused a rustle amongst the willows. Andre shut his eyes in order to enjoy the music of the phrase which kept haunting his mind, a pleasant *leit motif* to his masculine *amour propre*. "The man whose presence has upset my whole life."

The person to whom he had been so rude had said that. Could it be possible that, without

realising it, he had created such a deep impression on this woman, of whom he really knew nothing except that for two years she had been his mother's companion? Suddenly he remembered that he had read an amusing book called *From Hate to Love and vice versa*. It had made him laugh. To-day he began to wonder whether this ridiculous statement was not something more than the imagination of a humorist. Whether the aversion of a man to a woman may not be the prologue of future love. After all, if men who have had a fight can become great friends, why should not love grow between two people who have hated one another?

He applied the theory to himself :

"After all, I took a dislike to this woman from the very first because she persuaded poor little Gaby to go away. But now I understand it all. The unhappy Nadia was jealous, that explains everything. I must have been a fool not to have seen it."

Time went on. And the shade of Nadia, an invisible sylph, played hide and seek amongst the trees, wandered near him, a caressing, fugitive and coquettish figure. From time to time, he thought with an equivocal smile :

"Yesterday morning I could not have brought her appearance to my mind. And yesterday evening by the merest and most unexpected chance I saw her in pyjamas. I even saw her bosom without her realising it. It is more attractive than I should have thought."

He murmured her name and found it charming :

"Nadia. Nadia."

And once more the breeze passed through the

willows And once again the leaves rustled As if the neighbouring trees, interesting themselves in his self-examination, whispered their opinions as they wagged their high heads.

It was very warm that evening Since ten o'clock André had waited impatiently in the library He was not reading. Leaning against one of the high Renaissance windows, he was gazing into the park The façade of the château looked almost white in the clear night. The moon, in her first quarter, threw her shafts of steel on the wide reaches of the Loire that could be seen between the beech trees

Suddenly two perfumed hands were placed over his eyes He turned quickly. As on the previous night, Nadia had come in quite silently. But this time she was fully dressed A little black dress, bare arms, a green necklace round her throat.

"I was waiting for you with impatience, Nadia "

"To tell me that all our shadows are at an end, I hope."

"You know that well enough! "

"I was not so sure All the day I have thought of you "

"So have I of you "

"I wondered if the nice things you said to me last night were sincere Or whether you said what you did because you were sorry for me "

"How can you think that? "

"Well! we have been at daggers drawn for three weeks. And then suddenly, after a frank

explanation, we have shaken hands. It is rather astonishing, isn't it?"

"That proves that there was only a misunderstanding between us."

As they talked they were standing in front of the window. André led Nadia to the red leather couch. They sat down side by side under the marble bust. Nadia put her hand on his forearm. She smiled sweetly:

"I am not yet quite reassured, André."

"Oh!"

"Suppose that you have not really signed the peace. That is to say. Stop, I'm putting it rather clumsily. Listen to me. There is one thing above all others that would upset me. It would be to know that you had forgiven me out of pity. Do you understand? Because you are kind and do not like anyone to be unhappy. So perhaps you said to yourself: 'This poor woman is fretting over me. I must try and calm her, soothe her with gentle words—just idle talk!'"

"How foolish of you, Nadia. Your fears are absolutely groundless. It is true that for three weeks I detested you. I wished, by every means in my power to make you suffer for your interference at Tours. And then an extraordinary change came about. Is it a miracle? I don't know. But you are here. And I have been waiting for you without being able to open a book. And this afternoon in the country I have been thinking. I have been thinking of you all the time. Do you imagine that all that suggests the behaviour of the kind man who is moved by pity?"

"I believe you now, André."

"Then we are good friends, both of us?"

"Yes. Absolutely, sincerely."

"And at last we have come to understand one another?"

"Yes, truth and honour. We have three lost weeks to make up."

"Why, I know nothing about you, except that you are Russian."

"Oh! the pitiful odyssey of an exile is not very interesting."

"Yes, it is Nadia. Anything that concerns you is interesting to me now. I want to know—I want to know all."

"Ah well, I'll tell you that, little by little. You will find out what it means to have lived up to the age of nineteen in a country given over to the most horrible political throes. A country in which the sadistic traits of communism have first created a charnel house and now an immense prison where every man who dares to think freely, risks banishment or death. Ah! André, if you have detested me, you will forgive me from the bottom of your heart when you know the calvary I have been through over there."

"My poor Nadia!"

"But don't let us talk of that this evening. Life is beautiful. Why turn our thoughts to the red past, polluted by barbarous humanity? Come, don't let us think of it any more, André. Look at the peaceful night. The stars up there are twinkling as though they approved of our reconciliation."

Nadia put her head on André's shoulder. They

were silent. Montaigne smiled above them. The beautiful black cat that had come in by the half-opened door was noiselessly wandering in and out amongst the furniture. Suddenly André put his arm around Nadia's shoulders and bent over her as if he was already expecting her to offer her lips. But Nadia, apparently awaking out of a dream, softly pushed his face away with her little hand. She made a gentle protest :

"Great friends only, André."

He expostulated with a disappointed "oh !"

Nadia was inexorable. She had led her partner to the threshold of desire. That was enough for this evening. She knew the risks of a too rapid fall, the dangers of a conquest too easy. Her plan had succeeded so marvellously that it behoved her not to spoil it by hastening the epilogue.

Her experience of men dictated her conduct : temporize in order to gain a great victory ; refuse what is promised ; give suddenly an unexpected favour ; offer a kiss trustfully, but be offended and amazed when it is taken.

She now began to put André through the most refined tortures, holding him enchained, binding him, entangling him in an inextricable net of ungratified desires and suggestions of voluptuousness.

XII

SEPTEMBER The night is fresh, and in the breeze the first falling leaves flutter down like crumpled pieces of taffeta upon the gravel paths. It is one o'clock in the morning. For a long time the windows at Plessis Bréau have been in darkness. The drawn curtains in Nadia's rooms are the only ones through which a soft orange light can be seen.

Nadia and André are sleeping in the large sofa bed. A bottle of champagne in an ice pail is on the table close by, together with fruit and cakes, overshadowed by a vase of mauve chrysanthemums.

"What a good idea it was, my darling, to come this evening and celebrate the twenty first day of our love cure in your room. I feel that you are more to me in your bed, in these surroundings where you have lived alone for two years."

"André! How can you say that? A love cure. Then after three weeks, is it all over?"

"Don't be foolish! Don't you realise that I have come here to ask you to continue the treatment. Nadia, my *goloubka*. I adore that Russian word for a dove. My sweet *goloubka*! don't you understand that you have become as indispensable to me as the air that I breathe through the one good lung that I have left?"

"Then you would not like to part from me, my darling?"

"Once and for all I forbid you to speak like that. Give me your glass. A little sip of champagne, Nadioucha. Life is a wonderful play and you are the star."

"You say charming things, Dédé. I did so want to have tender words said to me to make me feel sincerely loved and protected by a man like you."

"Don't be afraid of the future. I am here."

"Ah! how sweet it is to abandon oneself. . . . For I am a poor little girl, really, André. Nobody can doubt it, for I do not look frivolous and I am very conscientious. However! Give me another glass of champagne. Fill yours too. Let's be merry, both of us. Hooray! Empty your glass at the same time as I do, as we do in Russia. Papa—Papa, who was a colonel in the Preobradjensky regiment, drank a whole bottle in the golden mess bowl and afterwards he shot through a playing card at a range of twenty metres with a revolver, to show that he knew how to drink."

"There, darling! I have emptied my glass. The fifth, you know. I will not say that I am going into the passage to fire three rounds with a pistol to show my skill. That would frighten my saintly mother."

"You like to drink with me, don't you, Dédé?"

"I adore it, dearest one."

"See. I'm going to wet my bosom in your glass and you shall kiss it dry. See?"

"Ah! You have wonderful ideas, Nadia. Oh, how I adore you!"

For three weeks they played like this every night.

The meetings in the library had lasted ten days. Each night Nadia had relaxed the curb a little, and each night André had watched her return to her room with regret, with a growing feverish desire that tormented him. When Nadia realised that she had nothing to gain in putting off the fatal moment, when she felt sure she had hesitated as long as is becoming to an honest woman, she decided one evening not to go down into the library. André waited for her until one o'clock, devoured by impatience. Then he could wait no longer, he went and knocked at her door.

She was in a white *deshabillé*. She shrank away when she saw André coming towards her. She murmured, as she put out her arms in defence:

"Go away! Go away! I did not come down this evening because I am at the end of my tether. I am afraid of myself, my weakness, my longing."

She fell into his arms murmuring:

"André! I want you and yet I don't want you."

He had taken her into his room. And every evening she consented to come to him in the silent hours when the chateau was asleep. With consummate art she led him on and whispered tender avowals that sound like marvellous music in the ears of a man.

"Ah! My André. My predestined lover. How wonderful you are, you hold me enthralled like a serf. It is cruel of you. How can I ever do without you?"

André drank in her words. He had quite for

gotten his little friend at Tours. . . . Poor Gaby ! This splendid Slav with her Asiatic blood had taken possession of him body and soul.

"What are you thinking of, darling ?"

"Of you, Nadia. Always of you, my *gol—gol—goloubka* !"

"Then drink in my glass and give me yours."

André gave an uncertain sort of laugh. He had been merry up till then. But intoxication was doing its work, his mind began to grow hazy. He giggled between the gulps as he drank. Nadia was watching him, her brain perfectly clear, her mind more active than ever. She smiled at her lover to encourage him. But beneath her smile there was the secret delight at seeing him become each night her toy. She felt more sure of being able to hold him in her clutches. And she was proud of her work.

Suddenly she seized his glass and sat up, listening intently :

"Hark !"

"What ?"

"Didn't you hear a door shut downstairs ?"

"A door ? No. It's Belkis having a game. Poor cat ! She is looking for a mate."

"Be quiet. I'm sure there is someone walking along the corridor."

"Eh, what ? Are you afraid of burglars—with six servants, a watchman, and me ?"

Nadia put the glass on the table. She was anxious. She had made a mistake to let André come to her room. If anything happened, the housemaid would come and awaken her and there would be a terrible scandal amongst the servants.

André clasped Nadia to him

"Come my sweetest girl Sleep awhile in
your Cossack's arms"

Suddenly there was a knock at the door Nadia
instantly put out the light But Madame Brennoy's
voice rang out impatiently

"Are you there, Nadia?"

The door was locked and bolted Madame
Brennoy's authoritative voice overawed her

"Please—will you open the door!"

Nadia got up On tip toe she went and picked
up her dressing gown She hoped to be able to get
out quickly, in the darkness, and speak to her in
the corridor She drew back the bolt

"Yes! What is it, Pauline? I was asleep,
I've heard nothing"

But Madame Brennoy did not wish to remain
outside She pushed open the door and switched
on the light

"But my dear, you have again forgotten to put
some malaga in my decanter How do you
suppose I can eat my biscuits without "

Madame Brennoy stopped short She had just
caught sight of André in her companion's bed,
André with his hair all rough and his pyjamas
crumpled, André who, to meet the situation,
quaffed jokingly the rest of his champagne Madame
Brennoy exclaimed

"Oh! André!"

"Ah well, what, my dear mother? I'm drink-
ing some extra-dry chun-chun!"

"In bed here!"

André gave a broad grin

"Yes. It would be impossible for me to maintain that I am at this moment on the Pont de l'Alma. And what about it, mother? eh?"

Whilst he was singing; *Dans le vie faut pas s'en faire!* Madame Brennoy looked at him and then at Nadia. Then she called out:

"You have made him drunk. It is disgusting!"

But André, who though intoxicated was chivalrous, would not hear a word against Nadia. He interrupted her:

"Ha! mother, hold hard. One word if you please. You forget that I am no longer a boy of fifteen. Now if you have any obs—obs—observations to make—er—not here if y'ples. No really, it is beyond all bounds. To speak like that to a fellow who was of age three years ago. You go too far, mother. I can go out without my nurse, I promise you. And be nice and kind and go and drink your little glass of malaga quietly in your room whilst I finish my champagne here. See! So now, good-night!"

Madame Brennoy, choking with suppressed emotion, exclaimed:

"But he is drunk. He has been drink . . . My son has been drinking in your room."

Then, turning to Nadia, she added harshly:

"Very well! I dispense with your services to-night. But to-morrow morning, at ten o'clock, you will come and see me and we will settle matters."

Madame Brennoy went out. Her steps died away in the corridor. André, who had appeared to be asleep, lifted up his head:

"All well? Mother has hopped off? Yes? Then that's all right. We can be at peace. Come quickly, my darling. You will catch cold. Come and get warm in our little nest."

Nadia, who had taken part in the scene without speaking a word, was thinking things over. She foresaw the consequences of being caught red handed. Rapidly she looked at the pros and cons. She weighed up the results of this imprudence. The conclusion that she came to must have been optimistic, for she locked the door, took off her dressing gown, she threw the coat of her pyjamas on an armchair and presented her beautiful figure to André, calling out:

"You are right. What matters the rest of the world, André, as long as we belong to each other!"

She took up her glass, and like a Bacchante let loose, she exclaimed:

"André! See! I am yours—yours for ever!"

It was a perfectly useless ceremony for Nadia to appear before Madame Brennoy at ten o'clock that morning. She knew quite well that there would be a scene. But she knew she would have the last word.

Madame Brennoy, as a matter of fact, waited for her in her boudoir. She did not receive her in a peignoir as she usually did. The gravity of the meeting led her to put on a day dress. Without any of the usual preliminary courtesies, she started on the subject of the interview.

"Nadia, I discovered you last night with my son and "

"Pardon me," protested Nadia, "you have surprised your son. There is a slight difference. Do not reverse the roles, I beg of you."

"Be quiet! Yes, be quiet, will you! If anyone has the right to speak here, it is I. By chance I have proved, without the slightest doubt, that you have become my son's mistress. You can imagine my amazement after his attitude towards you, after your outward coldness to one another, and in addition it shows me what a farce you have been playing, the two of you. It is a matter of absolute indifference to me that you have been sleeping with my son, who is old enough to know what he is doing and with whom he can amuse himself. I repeat, I should not interfere in this affair if my son was normal and in good health. But I have told you about Dr. Schwer's visit and the precautions he has advised if André does not wish to shorten his life. You knew all about it. You knew that excess of this kind would aggravate the danger which threatens him. Knowing all this, what do you do? You entice him to your room. You make him drunk. You take advantage of his weakness and overcome his will-power by giving yourself to him as you have done. And for that I shall never forgive you. It is a dastardly thing to do."

"Excuse me, Madame Brennoy. It seems to me that you are talking a little wide of the mark. You speak as though you were reprimanding a man who had led away a little girl of sixteen from the path of virtue."

"What you are doing now is worse!"

"Really!"

"It is a crime."

"Oh! Oh!"

"Absolutely. You know the truth and happily my poor boy does not. And that alone ought to have made you more circumspect. Instead of that you have been leading him on for a month. Every evening you have been surreptitiously going to him."

"Nothing of the kind. It was the first time he had come."

"To your room, yes. But you have been to his before. I know all about it. I asked Amelia and Edgar this morning."

"Oh, indeed! So now you set your servants to watch my actions!"

"Thank God they have told me. Your liaison with Andre is the joke of the servants' quarters. For a month they have been watching you. They have seen you go out secretly every night into the corridor in a stealthy manner and enter my son's room on tip-toe. Ah! that has indeed suddenly opened my eyes about you. It is a nice way of showing your devotion! You have let me see exactly what you are and I admit I never suspected it. An intriguer. You evidently said to yourself 'I'll make a dead set at young Brennoy. His mother gives him money. It's a good piece of business.'"

"Madame! You are speaking to Countess Nadia Feodorovna Brasloff. You seem to forget."

"You may be well born, but you have the instincts of a woman of the street."

"I will not hear another word from you. I will go."

"Ha! ha! Oh no, you shall not go like that. It is I who will turn you out. Do you understand that? This evening you shall pack your trunks: I will pay you two months wages in lieu of notice, and never come near me or my son again. Go. That is all I have to say."

Nadia had reached the boudoir door, shrugging her shoulders. She was about to go out without deigning to reply, when Madame Brennoy's last remark pulled her up. She looked at her over her shoulder with a defiant glance and called out:

"Never come near you again. Never! And I say it with pleasure. But as to your son, about that, we shall see!"

Nadia packed her trunks. This time she meant it. She could not stay another day in this house. The atmosphere was unbearable. Edgar had brought her meal into her room with a cynical smile on his face and excessive politeness that exasperated her. She could have boxed his ears with pleasure when he carried in a tray and asked with exaggerated deference:

"Is that all that Madame la Comtesse desires?"

At three o'clock André slipped into her room secretly to warn her.

"Listen, darling. I've had an hour's lecture before lunch. Mother will be sure to repeat it again this afternoon. Don't worry. Louis will drive you to Tours for the five o'clock train. Between now and then I will give you the latest

news I love you The rest is of no importance
You can rely on me "

An hour passed An hour in which Nadia weighed up her position She considered her chances about even With that fatalism that Slavs have inherited from their Asiatic neighbours, with absolute indifference she awaited the decree of fate She had done all she could to gain her ends She had used her brains as well as she knew how Perseverance had brought her in sight of harbour A sudden storm threatened to wreck her She could not do anything more at the moment She could neither change the course of events nor hasten the *dénouement* If André were won over by his mother's arguments, it meant a leap into the unknown, another station on the calvary of mediocrity and bad fortune André magnetised by his love, deaf to the appeal of reason, would mean the dawn of a better life, the upward turn which would lead to final success

At half past four, Louis the chauffeur came to fetch her trunks He also looked at her with ill-concealed contempt, which showed her clearly the dislike in which she was held in the servants' quarters Before he went down with the last trunk, he remarked

" Ah ! I had almost forgotten Monsieur André told me to give this to Madame Here you are Just think, I almost forgot the thing and left it in my pocket ! "

Nadia enraged, snatched the envelope from him and told him to leave the room He bowed as he went out of the door and said chaffingly

“A pleasant journey, Madame. I hope that Madame will soon be back again!”

When the door shut she tore open the envelope. She read these lines, written hurriedly in pencil: .

Nadia, my love, I have just had a lecture from my mother on three points. They are that you are a wicked woman, I am an idiot and that I endanger my health in loving you. In order not to thwart my good mother, whose mind is made up and who is in an indescribable condition, I am staying with her until dinner. Now, attend carefully. Do not take the five o'clock train at Tours. Wait for me after dinner at the Grand Cafe. I will come for you with my car about half-past nine. I will leave word with my mother that I am going off to the south. We will go and sleep at Bourges. And from there we will make for the Riviera. Long live the sun, my goloubka, my darling! Long live your sweet kisses and your tzigane songs. Don't be afraid. I adore you. André.

Nadia folded up the letter and put it in her bag. A smile hovered round her mouth. She was indeed one of those women of whom one can say: “When they smile the mobilisation of their forces has begun.”

XIII

JUAN-LES-PINS, that grill-room, with the sun as head cook, was displaying on its beach, its human viands, burnt, tanned and grilled. Bodies, three parts naked, were being cooked front and back. Ugly and beautiful, the beautiful more numerous, were exhibiting their breasts, scraggy or full, looking like red Indians. Here and there a pale bather betrayed by her white skin that she was a recent arrival.

André and Nadia hid their happiness at the *Provençal*. They enjoyed the pale rosy dawns from the top of their loggia and dreamed in the evening, gazing at the saffron splendour of the twilight upon the violet waters of the *Golfe Juan*.

For a fortnight André and Nadia lived in a hot house atmosphere, where the heavy perfume of sensuality kept them in a state of continued intoxication. André had had adventures. He had had his little love affairs, as he said to his beautiful Slav, with women without either imagination or intelligence. Up till now he had never known the enjoyment of living entirely for love, in the longing for future enjoyments and dwelling on the past. Nadia understood the art of love. Ever the mistress, she never let him forget it. She was the dispenser of untold joys.

She fed him with specious flattery that excited him.

"Do you know, my André, that I have discovered in you the soul of an Eastern Satrap, full of refined powers that only need a pupil worthy of you. You are a virtuoso. You may not know it, perhaps, but you have shown yourself to be the master that I dreamed of—so much so that every day I become more and more your plaything, your obedient slave. You can beat me, whip me, and make me suffer as you choose."

Every word that Nadia said, in her charming voice, was a seed sown in André's brain. It germinated at once. It grew in his mind, which was becoming a sort of dense forest, full of desires. He kissed her on the neck with the savagery of a wild animal. He was mad for her. He longed to make a martyr of her, and to worship her on his knees. To punish her until she called out in pain.

One evening they had left the Casino about midnight. André was proud of the success that Nadia had had in the blue and silver pyjamas that he had given her. The night was warm. Neither of them wanted to go to bed.

"I've an idea," exclaimed Nadia. "I'll go and bathe in that secluded little beach that I showed you between la Garoupe and Eden Roc."

"And so will I," said André.

"No, darling. Not you. It would not be wise. You must take care of your health. When I come out of the sea I will kiss you and we will imagine that we are savages living under the stars in a primitive world."

"Bravo! Nadia, you have wonderful ideas."

They went off in his open car. Nadia thought a bathing costume unnecessary at that hour. She was wrapped in her peignoir. They went down on to the tiny beach, hidden amongst the rocks. Behind the pines, the moon at the full, a huge orange tinted globe, rose gradually. A magnificent picture. Calm, deep, sapphire blue water. Nadia plunged into the sea, a mermaid escaped from one of Arnold Böcklin's romantic pictures. André waited for her impatiently. As she came out of the water she shed a shower of sparkling jewels. She was about to give her lips to André when they heard someone calling "Nadia! Nadia!"

The voice—a woman's voice—came from the rocks.

He turned round anxiously. Nadia called

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Katiza. You remember."

A woman, wearing a white dress, came out of the shadow. She had no hat on, and was carrying a long pale tortoiseshell cigarette holder in her delicate fingers. Her hair, of a beautiful Venetian red, seemed to have been coloured from Titian's palette. Her fair skin, untanned by the sun, still retained its milky whiteness, marble like in the limpid moonlight. Her green eyes, like stars shone with pleasure at this unexpected meeting. Behind her, a long haired grey collie, with its supple body, followed her from behind the shadowy rocks.

"What are you doing here, Nadia, in this costume?"

"I am fishing for moonbeams, darling. Let me introduce you to my friend, André Brennoy."

Nadia, quite nude, introduced him, as she would have done in a drawing-room.

"Madame Katita de Imredy. My charming friend from Hungary."

"Where are you stopping, you two?"

"At the *Provencal*. And you?"

"At the *Villa Persane*. Not far from *Eden Roc*. I have taken it for a month. I got here the day before yesterday." And turning to André, the beautiful Hungarian added: "I am delighted to find Nadia here. We knew one another at Budapest. Will you two come and take a glass of Tokay?"

"Yes, but first, Katitza, come and have a dip with me."

"I shouldn't mind, but I haven't a costume."

"Neither have I. What does it matter at this time of night?"

Katitza looked at André, hesitating. Nadia insisted:

"Dédé doesn't matter . . . he's all right, he won't take any notice. He is quite grown up."

Nadia had already assumed control of the situation, and had taken off her friend's white blazer and shoes, which she threw towards André, ordering him:

"Dédé, turn your head away whilst I count sixty."

The undressing was done in a twinkling. André counted in a loud voice, 57, 58, 59, 60. Then he turned round and saw two white figures running

into the water. The libertine nature of the incident appealed to him. He was intensely amused. Katitza and Nadia gambolled in the sea like young maidens in the isles of Greece. He caught glimpses of them as they plunged and thought himself a very fortunate person. When they came out he met them with the peignoir.

"Give it to Katitza," said Nadia. And as the Hungarian girl hurried into the shadow, she called out "Oh! don't make a fuss. One shows almost as much at midday on the beach. Come quickly, rub yourself down. I am doing so. I'm not cold. André, help her to put her arm into the sleeve! Rub her back! I'll do the rest."

They laughed as they played the parts of bath attendant and masseuse. Nadia helped her friend to dress. Katitza, put into a good humour by the gaiety of the young lovers, said jokingly to André:

"Ah! Don't look at me whilst I put on my dress. I am far more immodest half dressed than I was just now."

Nadia agreed.

"Quite right. Kiss me, André. And now, he who loves me follows me."

She ran towards the rocks, followed by André and Katitza. Suddenly she stopped.

"Ha! Ha! You both love me. Splendid! Come along. The sea has made me thirsty."

They were all three lolling on the sofa in the large drawing room at the *Villa Persane*. Through the open French windows, looking out on to the

bay, one could see the shimmering water rippling in the moonlight, throwing spangles on to her robe, trimming it with golden light. Over there on the left was the glow of Palm Beach at Cannes; the twinkling lights of the little harbour of the Golfe Juan; the fairy lights of Juan-les-Pins, and the headlights of the yachts anchored off the casino.

A gramophone was playing Brahms' adorable *Petite Valse*. The iced Tokay looked misty in the tall Bohemian glasses. Perfect harmony united the trio. Whilst Nadia rested her head on André's arm, he told Katitza how he admired her country.

"I went to Budapest last year with a friend from the sanatorium. I spent a delightful month there. That pearl of the Danube is not only attractive on account of its architectural beauty, it speaks to the heart and to the senses through its music. Ah! dear friend, why don't you live there in perpetual rapture. Your tziganes know so well how to excite the nerves with the virtuosity of their bows. Hungarian music is an aphrodisiac which distills, drop by drop, its harmony into the hearts of lovers; it is a philtre which operates slowly, by the savagery of its rhythm and the languour of its melodies."

"Yes, dear André," replied the Hungarian, her hands behind her head, her eyes gazing at the starry heavens. "I am glad to hear you speak like that. It flatters me that a Frenchman loves my country. There is an affinity between us, that tragic events have never seriously disturbed. The heroes of your history are the brothers of our Zrinyi and

our Rakoczy You have a Marseillaise that thrills you We, when we hear our famous Tzigane Berkes, we thrill also "

Nadia, caressing Katitza's bare arm, was saying to André

"You know Katitza's ancestors fought against the Turks at Szigetvar "

"That's true, Nadia I care for nothing except the love of my country and the miraculous power of the stones from Lake Balaton Beyond that!" (She gave a shrug of her shoulders) "Prejudices, little rules for good middle-class folk . . . I have been divorced twice, so I know men The grand passion? A parody in the theatre of Lilliput I only believe in sex appeal That is the one thing that is not deceptive For example, Nadia, your hand up and down my arm excites the full chromatic scale of my sensitive nerves Go on, darling "

The hours passed The moon hung in a filmy halo Iced liqueurs had taken the place of the Tokay One record after another wafted the rhythm of the intoxicating czardas into the night Nadia murmured to her friend

"Shall we come and see you often, Katitza? "

"Oh! yes Come to-morrow "

"Then, you must be the musical conductor of our love "

"Better still won't you two be my guests? "

André began to protest, for the sake of politeness Nadia intervened

"I accept for him and for myself "

"I shall be delighted There is a nice room next to mine on the first floor "

"We will take down the partition, won't we, Dédé?"

André nodded assent. He was incapable of resisting. The temptation was too strong. He was carried away by the music and Nadia's proposal excited his curiosity.

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Nadia and Katitza walked into the baccarat room. They played for the fun of the thing. Nadia, between two bancos, was telling her friend, who had just come to Juan-les-Pins, about the people.

"Look round the table! All sorts of specimens of the fauna of various countries. Your neighbour, a charming little American, very self-assured, is playing with her mother's money. She is under age. I need hardly mention it. Next to her is a gigolo who is playing with his girl friend's money; the lady who looks like a pork butcher's wife on holiday, usually sits over there at the large table. The other day, when her partner at *chemin-de-fer* turned up a 5 and hesitated, she called out at the top of her voice: "For God's sake make up your mind. Are you going to take a card or not." That little lady further on always pretends to go shares with lonely gentlemen. When she wins, all is well. When she loses she takes them to the bar and arranges the settlement of reparations. At the far end over there that dowager with chrome yellow hair, who looks at her cards with her lorgnettes and takes them with her hand in an indiarubber glove, is Princess Rathenblitz; and standing behind are her secretary

and doctor. The secretary carries her jewels and her stocks and shares in a steel box fastened by a chain to his waist. The doctor accompanies her every evening because she is afraid of dying between midnight and four o'clock in the morning. That is owing to the prediction of a fortune-teller at Nice whose warning has upset her."

"But her hand in the indiarubber glove?"

"That's for hygienic reasons. She is afraid to touch the slipper because it passes from hand to hand."

"And who are those two very refined looking gentlemen on the right who keep their eyes fixed on her?"

"Two other gigolos who hope to make an impression on her. They have been after her for a week. But it is not merely the slipper that the princess handles with an indiarubber glove, she allows these gentlemen to come near her only when they have been sprayed with a disinfectant! The secretary had his little joke the other evening. Rathenblitz told him to get rid of another unfortunate lover. Touching the shoulder of this Antinous, he whispered to him.

" 'Pop off, my friend. Don't keep on worrying. The princess's charity list is full up.' "

André appeared at the far end of the gaming-room. Nadia was playing, sitting next to Katizza. She made a sign to him.

"Lend me fifty lous, darling. I'm doing badly this evening."

André gave her the notes and murmured:

"Come to the bar. I want to speak to you."

She followed him when the slipper was empty and found him, pensive, sitting on a settee.

"What's the matter, darling? Are you angry with me because I've lost two thousand francs this evening?"

"Oh! That doesn't matter. Or at least that didn't matter until this evening. But I've just been to the hotel. I asked if there were any letters and I found one from mother. You'll soon see what's the matter."

He gave her four closely written pages. She read:

My dear boy, you know that I do not worry you with very long letters. It is a month since you went off to enjoy yourself on the Riviera, and I have written to you twice in answer to your letters. But your last one compels me to speak to you, and this time very seriously.

I gather that you are not in the least tired of the person who has accompanied you there, in spite of my objection, and that not only do you not appear disposed to come back and stay at Plessis-Bréau, but you seem to have made up your mind to remain at Juan until further orders.

In these circumstances I am obliged to use my influence and remind you that you are in a delicate state of health and that the life you are leading down there will only aggravate your complaint. I am enclosing a last cheque for five thousand francs to pay your hotel bill and your travelling expenses back home. Don't look to me for any more in the future so long as you remain with this woman who, I am sure, has a bad influence over you. Believe me, my dearest boy, I am greatly distressed to

refuse you anything, for the first time. But my responsibility as a mother is at stake. You will, I am sure, understand that it is a mother's love that makes me do this. If you really hate any love for me, my son, and I am sure you hate, you will come back at once and set your poor mother's mind at rest.

I remain your devoted mother, who is longing for you to return.

Nadia gave the letter back to André. She was laughing no longer. The sudden drop back to earth upset her as much as it did him. He tried to make light of it.

"Ah well, my darling! That's, as they say, cut the painter."

"Yes."

"Very annoying."

"Haven't you any more money? You know, André, that I have never been indiscreet enough to speak of these things, but as we are up against it we've got to face the facts. In plain words you will have very little money in the future."

"I've just four thousand francs left from the ten that my mother gave me. I sent for my money from Geneva which was about two thousand three hundred Swiss francs. Altogether we have got through twenty-seven thousand francs in a month. That's clear enough."

"And so, my little Dédé. What are you going to do? Are you going to be a professional dancer at Cannes and am I going to sell smoked glasses on the front? Didn't your father leave you any money?"

"Listen a minute, darling. This is the exact position. Whilst I was ill in Switzerland, I never bothered about anything. Mother sent me all the money I wanted. Since I've left the château I've telephoned to the lawyer, and I find that the liquidation of my father's inheritance is very complicated. He could not explain it all by telephone, but he has advised me, in a friendly way, to get my mother to advance some of it at the moment, as I cannot realise."

"I understand."

"It is annoying because, for the time being, I am at the mercy of my mother."

"That's a nuisance."

"It is, indeed. But when a mother, who has a kind heart, like mine has, receives two million income that she does not spend, she can easily advance her son fifteen or twenty thousand francs a month, can't she? I am not greedy, with that we can manage till the spring. Well, there's only one way of doing it, that's by going home."

"You, by yourself?"

"No, the two of us."

"You're mad! Your mother hates me, and my presence would only make things worse."

"Nonsense, Nadia. You shall come with me. I will talk to mother in front of you and I will tell her that I agree to everything she wishes on condition that you remain at Tours where I can see you every day. We will finish the autumn like that. Then to Paris, you'll see."

"You are out of your mind, André! I cannot face your mother."

"Very well. You shall wait for me in the car I will first have a talk with her If she is impossible I will go away with you, there and then But you'll see; she will give way in a few days. I know mother."

XIV

THE telegram announcing André's coming had filled Madame Brennoy's heart with intense joy. She was waiting for him at six o'clock in the evening at the château. She had given orders to have his room ready and that the dinner was to be a particularly good one.

André had been motoring all day. As he got near Plessis-Bréau he looked forward nervously to the discussion he would have with his mother. He pulled up at the end of the avenue of plane trees and said to Nadia :

"I think it will be best to stop here. I will go the last hundred yards on foot. You, you had better wait for me in the car. I shall be a good half-hour before I come back to fetch you and take you to mother. You must make friends and it will be all right."

"I will stay here, Dédé . . . like a good little girl. Kiss me before you go."

André bent over the step. Nadia gave him one of those kisses which increase the will power ten times, and she murmured as she broke away from his embrace :

"My love . . . my lover. Remember I shall be there in reality. You will feel my spirit hovering over you."

"Trust me, Nadioucha I love you more than ever So long"

André disappeared down the avenue with her sweet perfume on his lips He opened the French windows of the large drawing room His mother was sitting in an armchair playing patience, to see if she would get her wish She got up, amazed

"André! How did you get here? I never heard your car"

"I've left it near the garage Good-evening, mother"

"My darling! How delightful! Indeed it is good to see you You look as though you were tired, you know"

They talked of those thousand and one things that are so dear to a mother's heart She was anxious about his health He tried to reassure her But she shook her head For a quarter of an hour they talked round the point without daring to come to it At last she remarked

"Listen, dear, I am sure you have lost a couple of pounds weight in a month Yes, yes, I can see it in your face Have you weighed your self?"

"No"

"That doesn't matter I am sure of it Two pounds, it is terrible. You must try and regain it here But you'll see I shall put you on a regime"

"Come, mother, don't worry I know that I am not a perfect athlete But don't look on me as though I had one foot in the grave Wait a while Now let us talk first of all about our

little financial affairs. You have, in fact, written me a lawyer's letter."

"Oh!"

"Yes. The letter of a lawyer who threatens his client in order to make him take his advice. Answer my question frankly: So long as I am unable to touch the money my father left me, will you be kind to me?"

"Why yes, my dear boy."

"Advance me a certain amount. Say—I should be contented with twenty thousand francs a month."

"As much as you like. Your health above everything. You shall stay with me. You shall live here."

"Ah! no. I do not leave one sanatorium to go to another. I want to live, Mother. To live! To live!"

"What you call living is to carry on an affair with this woman who is killing you by inches."

"You are absurd! Come! Is it because I have taken your companion that you don't see things clearly?"

"But you don't understand, my poor boy, that this woman has got you in her clutches . . . that she is playing a despicable game."

"Ah, no Mother! No! I assure you. I know her better than you do, your Nadia, you know. In two months I have studied her better than you have been able to do in two years. She is quite unmercenary. She went off with me, she left her position without troubling to find out if personally I had any money or not. When I

confessed to her that I had no more, she was sweeter and more affectionate than ever. If she was out for what she could get, as you imagine, she had an excellent opportunity of letting me down."

"You do not realise that she is too clever for that. She is counting on the future."

"Mother, let me tell you, you are quite off the track. It is an idea that you have got into your head. You must get rid of it at once. Besides I am going to make a confession to you. Nadia is over there in the car. She has come with me at my request. I'll go and fetch her. I'll bring her here. You shall make it up, and."

Madame Brennoy got up and exclaimed with anger.

"Never! Never shall this woman set foot in my house again!"

"Why? Because she is my mistress? Your principles do not allow you to receive a woman that I love and who makes my life happy?"

"André, if it were any other woman, I would receive her with pleasure. Thank God, I am not stupid enough to have, in these days, prejudices of that kind. But this woman! Ah! never. She will ruin you, André. I am certain of it. This woman showed herself to me in her true colours the day you went away."

André rose, furious. All that his mother had said about Nadia wounded him deeply. He looked on it as unjust, as an undeserved attack. He made a great effort to keep calm and replied icily.

"That is enough, Mother. Let us go on. Do you wish me to break with her?"

"Yes."

"If I don't you will continue to cut off supplies?"

"Yes."

"You refuse even to advance me my father's legacy?"

"Certainly! I will save you in spite of yourself."

"Very well. I shall go away at once. I am grieved to leave you like this, but you give me no option."

"Not a sou, André. You understand? Not a sou until you learn where your own safety lies."

For the first time in his life he left abruptly, without kissing his mother, without saying good-bye. For a long time she remained standing in the large drawing-room as the twilight deepened little by little. She was in despair, but determined. Her heart ached. But she was trying to save him, and her suffering was a secondary consideration. She felt that it was necessary to be firm, that her unrelenting attitude would soon put an end to this liaison. Nadia, realising that there was no more money to be got from this youth, convinced that her hopes were dashed by the obstinacy of his far-seeing mother, would make up her mind to leave him, without regret, without the slightest scruple, and go and seek her fortune elsewhere.

André, frowning, walked down the avenue. The car was hardly visible in the fading grey light. He could see Nadia's white beret, and at length he could distinguish her, with a strained look of

curiosity on her face. She put her hand on the door

"Well, darling, is the peace signed?"

"No"

She gave a start. In spite of her doubts, she had secretly hoped that things would settle themselves amicably. André explained in a low voice:

"Mother offered me twenty thousand a month. But only on condition that I left you and lived at home with her. I have refused."

Nadia did not betray her real feelings. She said in a voice so soft that it seemed to be deadened by the semi-darkness of nightfall:

"André, you need not refuse, you know. I would not wish you to do so for anything in the whole wide world"

"What are you talking about?"

"I am standing in the way between your mother and yourself. I will go"

"What! Here is my answer to that!"

He took her by the shoulders and kissed her on the lips—a long kiss. Then, feeling his determination strengthened, he jumped into the car by the side of Nadia, and exclaimed:

"The bank is shut, my *golonbka*, that's of no consequence. Do you think that once back in Paris I shall want to go home? No fear. And to begin with, we will go and dine at Blois and buck ourselves up with a good bottle of wine. What do you say, Nadioucha?"

"You darling!"

The car swung into the main road and followed the Loire, with its green banks, along the raised

roadway. André, leaning on the wheel, drove on in silence. Nadia, wrapped up in her coat, was staring at the shining lights of the passing cars. She was thinking, calculating. She was looking at the situation from every point of view. She was speculating about the immediate future, like a gold-digger who has struck a reef, and found a few nuggets, then suddenly losing the vein, is considering whether it is better to carry on or try in another place. A week ago, if one had asked her :

"Do you think you have all the trump cards in your hand ?"

She would have answered :

"Certainly."

This evening she was doubtful as to her chances. Hence the little bitter curl of her lip. Hence her continued silence. Suddenly André interrupted her :

"What are you thinking about, Nadia ?"

She was so absorbed in her dreams that she had to make an effort to come back to reality. She replied mechanically :

"I am thinking how I adore you, my darling."

He insisted :

"You seem preoccupied."

Then she protested gently :

"Oh ! no. But it is a little chilly this evening."

Nadia and André, back in Paris, were installed, for the time being, at the *Royal Monceau*.

This morning, it was just a month since he had left the château. Nadia, sitting alone in the bed,

her arms around her bent knees, was thinking things over. She was reviewing the situation coldly, like a business man studying a balance sheet.

"How do we stand, exactly? André seeks in vain to get out of this dilemma. Every day there are suggestions, but they are futile. The old lady is inflexible. He has only two thousand francs left to live upon. That is not enough to enable him to wear out his mother's patience. He must hold out, month after month. Then, he would end by being master of the situation. That is to say, I should be. But to do that, we must have money, and the lawyer won't give it. The time has come to ask myself if, under the circumstances, I am not in a trap, if I have not got into a blind alley. Cannot I force fate? Can I take the initiative in some way which will hasten events?"

She thought things over. Into her alert brain ideas kept coming, good ones, bad ones, stupid ones, mad ones. She put them into the melting pot of her active reasoning powers. Suddenly she took the blotting pad and began, with pencil and paper, the outline of a letter.

My dear André

She stopped, tore it up and began again:

My darling André

Then, putting the pencil in her mouth, she hesitated for a long time. Her plan was simple, and conformed to the laws of psychology, to the rules of the *Kriegspiel* of love. Like an anxious jockey who spurs on his horse for fear he will not reach the post, she must give him a dig. Love and

libertine recreations were all very well; but they were not enough. It was necessary to vary the routine. A disappearance for several days, suddenly, without any apparent reason, should be the first admonition. Yes, that was not a bad idea. It was merely necessary to write a letter in which passion and reserve added a spice of mystery, more so if she could give a *poste restante* address at Versailles. She would leave the letter on the table, and go off before noon with her little bag and her suitcase. She would go and hide herself in one of the small hotels on the left bank. Then a week later she would go to Versailles to the post office to get the disconsolate letter that André would be sure to send her. She wrote :

You know that for the last three months, the deep love that I have for you is the only thing that makes me want to live. You know that your sweet companionship has become indispensable to me and that without your kisses I am like a lost soul. But it is imperative that you should know. . . .

She stopped short. The door opened suddenly. André came into the room. She had only just time to hide the letter under the clothes and let her pencil fall on the floor. André tossed aside his hat and ran to her. She threw her arms round him and smothered him with kisses. She did not understand. Then he began :

“Nadia! Smile. Nadia! Life is sweet. Shut your eyes. Open them. No, not yet. Now look and say whether or not you believe in miracles. But look!”

He held up a cheque. Nadia immediately looked at the amount and thought she was dreaming *Ore hundred and twenty-five thousand francs*. She looked at André.

"One hundred and twenty five thousand francs, Dédé? It isn't possible. Where have you. . . How have you?"

"Wait, my little bird of paradise. I'll tell you. Let me catch my breath. I ran along the passage to get here quicker. That makes my lungs wheeze—or rather my lung. Well, listen to me carefully. I did not tell you anything about it in order not to raise false hopes, above all after my unsuccessful visits to the lawyer, but for four days I have been in touch with a fellow named Lerouet, to whom my friend Delbracque introduced me, he is a business man. What sort of business I don't know. Anyway, I'm mad with glee. He has some capital to spare and advances money on securities and such like things. Delbracque sounded him about my business. Yesterday evening Monsieur Lerouet telephones me to go and see him. I go. I find him a decent sort of fellow. Not at all like the regular crooked money lenders of the old melodramas. I wish you could see this pawn broker. A smart looking man, Nadia. About thirty five, a black pearl pin in his tie, looks like a tennis champion. And all there. Ah! you bet. Our conversation was not at all like a business interview. We talked of Alpine climbing, yachting, travelling. And then he said to me quite casually

"By the way, Monsieur Brennoy, your friend

Delbracque has told me that you were a little bothered for the moment and that you need an advance on your father's inheritance. I know all about the trust securities. They are unfortunately quoted rather low just now. But if you will sign a bill for two hundred thousand francs I will risk it and let you have, straight away, a hundred and twenty-five thousand. You will see that I am not greedy, as I take my chance in the transaction.' As you may imagine, I accepted there and then. And that is why you see me with this paper in my hand. Thanks to that we have time to see what will happen. We can hold out, do you understand?"

"Yes, I understand, Dédé."

"In the meantime, my *goloubka*, you can go to Jane Régny's and order three dresses: morning, afternoon and evening. And three new hats to go with them. And a mink coat ready for the first cold weather. We will pay half. The rest later."

"You are a perfect darling."

"Whilst you are doing this, I will go and see the owner of that furnished flat in the Avenue Henri-Martin, that you liked. We'll go in to-morrow. And there you are! Isn't life like a game of baccarat, Nadia? One has a run of tens, and then whoopee! a banco of a hundred and twenty-five thousand."

André sprang on to the bed in childlike glee, picked up Nadia, danced round with her, caressed her and kissed her. The letter that she had been sketching out and had hidden under the clothes fell

out. Nadia tried to get rid of it. But André had seen it. He noticed her gesture.

"What are you hiding there, darling?"

"Nothing! a sheet of paper, that's all."

"Then why put it away like that?"

Nadia suddenly became alarmed. A wave of anxiety passed through her. There was no reason for her letter now. How could she justify the contents? André roughly held her arm and took the paper. He stood back quickly and deciphered it half aloud.

"My darling André, you know that for the last three months, the deep love that I bore for you is the only thing that makes me want to live. You know that your sweet companionship has become indispensable to me and that without your kisses I am like a lost soul. But it is imperative that you should know. . . ."

He stopped, perplexed. He did not understand. Then Nadia, who had not remembered at what point she had stopped, breathed freely. She realised instantly what capital she could make out of the incident, so with perfect ingenuousness, with an embarrassed and modest air, she admitted.

"Listen, André. I had begun this letter in your absence so that you should find it when I had gone to the hairdresser's at midday. I was going to end my letter like this: *But you shall know also, that in spite of the worries and difficulties that we have gone through, I mean to remain more true and more devoted to you than ever . . .* Do you understand? Your unexpected return did not

give me time to finish the little *billet doux* that I was leaving for you to cheer you up, in case you should have come back more worried than ever. Do you understand ? ”

André listened with delight. He went up to the bed, ashamed of his suspicions. He took her two little hands, put them to his lips and with infinite tenderness he murmured :

“ Nadioucha. Oh, Nadioucha, my little darling wife ! ”

XV

CHRISTMAS drew near Nadia and André were living together. A happy couple. Every week Nadia asked in a casual manner, at least outwardly

"What is the news, Dédé?"

And André, jokingly, remarked.

"All quiet on the Touraine front."

"The enemy holds out well, my poor boy!"

"Never mind, we shall have them!"

"Who—what?"

"Funds"

As a matter of fact, Madame Brennoy did not seem to be ready to sign the armistice. André did not write to her. Neither did she write. During the month of November he had suffered from a chill. He had had a high temperature and was weary and worn out, and had become as weak as a small child. He was almost writing to her. The instinctive call of a child in distress. But his health had improved. As soon as the illness had passed, or rather had lessened, he had only one desire, to impose his will upon his mother. However, the thousand franc notes were vanishing.

This morning Nadia was surprised to see him go out at an early hour. She did not question him, but it astonished her that he should leave before midday. He came back beaming with

satisfaction, and had hardly got into the room, where Nadia was carefully polishing her nails, before he put a packet, carelessly tied up in an old newspaper, on to the dressing-table.

"Open it, Nadioucha."

"What is it, Dédé? A pair of old shoes?"

"Look and see."

She cut the string, and bundles of thousand franc notes fell amongst the scent bottles and pots of face cream. Amazed, Nadia looked up.

"Handle them, Nadia. Handle them, they aren't paper streamers, but bank notes, beautiful notes quite new! Two hundred of them. That is to say, two hundred thousand francs."

"But where have you been?"

"To see the immaculate Monsieur Lerouet, and then to the bank."

"It's incredible! You said that this man could not advance you any more on your succession."

"Wait a minute. I'll tell you what happened whilst it's all fresh in my mind. It's barely half-an-hour since. Ah! I'm hot! This is exactly what took place. At nine o'clock this morning I had an appointment with Monsieur Lerouet. He greeted me very heartily. I asked him to advance me some more money on my inheritance under my father's will. He said:

"Alas! Monsieur Brennoy, it is impossible. I know all the details of your rights. Unfortunately the shares that your father left you would represent, in actual money value, about four million eight hundred thousand francs if they were at par. But

that is not the case. You have a great parcel of American General Copper which were valued at a hundred and ten dollars three years ago, but they have dropped to twelve dollars. They may perhaps rise again, but for the moment it would be foolish to touch them. Then again, your father had two million in Santa Cruz preference shares. I am sorry to tell you that these mines will be in liquidation in a short time, and I would not give twenty thousand francs for them."

"I was frightfully upset at hearing all this. I understood at last the reason of the lawyer's reserve, who had said every time that I went to see him 'I cannot give you the exact amount of your inheritance. I am making enquiries about your Santa Cruz. They have not been quoted for a month.' In fact, Nadioucha, I saw myself in the cart when Monsieur Lerouet gave me a ray of hope. Seeing my sad expression, he said: 'Monsieur Brennoy, don't despair. There are always ways of arranging things. Listen. I know who your mother is. She has from thirty to forty millions. You have something behind you. I am quite ready to advance you, to begin with, for example, two hundred thousand francs.'"

"Oh! Monsieur Lerouet, you are too kind!"

"Only, all the same I must have a guarantee, you understand."

"I did not quite follow what he meant. Then he went on:—

"Come, now! can't you get a bill from your mother, a bill of three hundred thousand francs at six months, for instance. The hundred thousand

francs would represent the interest on my loan. I am not asking a large sum, as you see."

"I can always get a draft from my mother, but. . . ."

"Obviously it must be accepted by her."

"She'll never do it. I didn't know what to do, I was miserable, then Monsieur Lerouet helped me."

"You know, Monsieur Brennoy, how a bill is drawn? You draw it up yourself with the name and address of Madame P. Brennoy. In order for me to accept it, it must be made out for three hundred thousand francs, then I will give you a cheque for two hundred thousand, but the bill must be endorsed—quite a small matter—as follows: Accepted and signed P. Brennoy on the back of it. Well, Monsieur Brennoy, if you are not a child, you will bring me the bill endorsed and completed in proper form."

"The amiable Monsieur Lerouet cheered me up. I saw what he meant at once. I asked him:

"You advise me to sign for my mother, to imitate her signature?"

"Oh, monsieur! I don't advise anything at all. I have said, from a purely technical point of view, in what form I can accept your bill. It is for you to arrange it. You bring me a bill on Madame Brennoy payable to me. That is all. The rest does not concern me."

"And if my mother refuses to pay in six months' time?"

"Quite simple. Listen. I have taken a liking to you. I am speaking to you as a friend. I shall

apply to the court. She will be obliged to pay. For I cannot believe that Madame Brennoy, in spite of your momentary disagreements, would let you be convicted for fraud."

"No, obviously. But it is not very honest, Monsieur Lerouet."

"That is merely forcing a relative's hand. You know, Monsieur Brennoy, all business is run more or less on these lines."

"So you see, Nadia, Monsieur Lerouet is a man who knows the ropes. What could I do? I followed his advice. And an hour later I brought the bill signed by myself, stamped and endorsed by my mother. The cashier gave me twenty packets of ten notes of a thousand each. As it was rather bulky, he kindly gave me an old newspaper. I wrapped them up in front of an astonished customer, who exclaimed: 'Well, I'm hanged! He's taking them away like a pound of runner beans!' I jumped into a taxi and here I am."

Nadia listened attentively to his story. Her delight was somewhat marred. The two hundred thousand francs was a poor consolation for the bad news that Monsieur Lerouet had told. She tried to hide her disappointment.

"Yes, Dedé. It is very cleverly arranged. But you do not seem to have given me a full account of the position. In short, you are very nearly ruined. Your father's millions have been lost. There is very little left."

"That's true, Nadia. And it was no laughing matter when Lerouet informed me of the actual value of my fortune. But don't forget, the essential

thing is to hold on. My mother, in a little while, will give in, and I will see that she makes good the fall in my father's estate. You will see! You will see!"

"Yes . . . perhaps. . . ."

"Come, Nadia darling. Let us be happy together. Put on the gramophone, one of those czardas that our friend Katitza liked so much, and let us dance!"

Sunday morning, January 5, André was called to the telephone by one of his friends from the sanatorium who was passing through Paris. He invited him to lunch. André wanted to refuse, but Nadia insisted upon him going.

"Yes, Dédé, spend the afternoon with your friend. I'm sure that he will have some interesting news to tell you."

"Yes, I should like to know what's happening to everyone over there."

"It just fits in. I will lunch with Natatcha, one of my Russian friends, you know, the dress-maker in the Rue de Marignan. I should like to see her."

André went off at eleven o'clock. His friend took him by car to Rambouillet. They lunched and chatted for a long time. About six o'clock André returned. He hurried back to Nadia for he rarely left her for longer than an hour or two. She had not come in. He expected her to be home for dinner, and read the evening papers. At eight o'clock he began to grow anxious. It was unusual for her to leave him without a word. Unless she

had unexpectedly decided to stay to dinner with her friend André waited another half hour, then unable to wait any longer he telephoned to 59, Rue de Marignan. A servant answered

"Madame Natatcha? Yes, Monsieur, this is her house."

"Is Madame Nadia Brasiloff still there?"

"What do you say, Monsieur? What name?"

He repeated his question. The girl replied

"Is the lady employed at Madame's?"

André grew impatient

"No, no. She is a friend of your mistress. The lady who lunched with her to-day."

"Excuse me, Monsieur, but you are making a mistake. Madame Natatcha has been in Cannes for two days and will not be home before the end of the week."

André, taken aback, could not find anything to say. He hung up the receiver. For several minutes he stood perfectly still staring at the carpet. Nadia's lie was a great shock to him. It was like a stone that had suddenly fallen from a clear sky and disturbed the peaceful surface of a lake.

He sat down in an armchair. Why hadn't Nadia told him the truth? He did not keep her shut up like a jealous pasha. Why should she invent this fictitious lunch? She had only to tell him exactly what she intended to do.

He pondered over it. To tell me exactly

But could she speak frankly? Had she
a secret flirtation? The word flirtation seemed
to him to be too gentle. Nadia? Another

lover? . . . These questions whirled through his tormented mind. One thought led to another. An absurd hypothesis quickly changed into a terrible suspicion. He put his head between his hands.

"It can't, it can't be possible. Another lover? She is not leaving me to tell me that. When could she have found the time? No! It is idiotic. When a woman deceives a man she betrays herself. If she had been unfaithful to me, I should have discovered it. Of course. . . . And besides, why should she deceive me? I have money. I love her and she has proved hundreds of times that she cares for me."

The door bell rang. The housemaid had gone out. He got up hurriedly, haunted by fear of an accident. Nadia had a key of the flat. It could not be her. He opened the door. A messenger boy gave him a letter. He looked at it and recognised Nadia's writing. Then, he ran, his heart beating, to the light in the sitting-room, and read:

My darling André, when you get this I shall be in the express leaving France. I have come to the conclusion that my sudden departure is the only way out of a futile situation. My being with you has become impossible. On my account you have quarrelled with your mother, and in order to live you have been obliged to resort to dangerous practices. I am doing you a kindness in leaving. You may be sure that I go away heartbroken, and because I wish for your happiness and tranquillity. André, do not forget me. Always your Goloubka.

P.S. *If you have anything to say to me, write poste restante Milan. I shall be passing through that town in a week's time.*

At ten o'clock, when the housemaid entered the room, she gave a scream. André was lying unconscious on the floor.

XVI

"My dear friend," said Monsieur Dassagny, as he entered the hall of the château, "am I being indiscreet in coming to hear your news?"

Madame Brennoy held out her hands to him.

"What a pleasant surprise, my dear Edmond! Where have you come from? And where are you going?"

"I'm motoring down to Bordeaux. So before stopping at Tours I thought. . . ."

"But, you'll dine with me?"

"I don't want to bother you."

"On the contrary. You'll be doing me a kindness. I am very dull."

Monsieur Dassagny gave orders to his chauffeur. Half an hour later he was at the table facing Madame Brennoy.

"We never see you in France nowadays. At any rate it's two years since I had that pleasure. Is it the beautiful Turkish ladies who hold you so fast?"

"Certainly not. It's the Franco-Ottoman Bank that keeps me almost always in Stamboul. From one point of view I am not sorry, for I get on very well with the Turks. There is order there, thanks to Gazi, who is a wise dictator and a clever politician. And then there is the Bosphorus, which

holds you by its poetry, its setting, its colour
The cap has replaced the fez, the *yachmak* no longer hides faces, and the Latin alphabet has taken the place of the beautiful antiquated Turkish writing, it's true But the country even now possesses much of its hygone charm"

"Lucky man! You travel But here am I, living like a hermit"

"I admit I hardly hoped to find you at this time of the year"

"This year I am kept here André is in Paris"

"Ah! he has left the sanatorium You have not told me about his health How is he?"

"My dear friend don't speak of it .
It is the grief of my life"

Monsieur Dassagny sympathised with her and tried to console her as well as he could During dessert he suddenly remarked

"By the way, Pauline, you wrote to me two years or more ago telling me you had a lady companion—a Russian"

Madame Brennoy did not think it necessary to go into all the details that had thrown a shadow over her life After a slight hesitation, she replied

"Quite true I had her here But she has gone"

Monsieur Dassagny looked at Pauline with curiosity

"Gone?"

"Yes, why?"

"Nothing"

"I don't follow you, Edmond You've got some idea at the back of your mind"

The banker hesitated.

"Listen, my dear. I want to clear up a mystery that puzzled me when I was in Stamboul. If I am not making a mistake, you wrote about that time that you intended to engage someone to read to you, a woman named Nadia Brasiloff."

"Yes, Countess Brasiloff."

"The name called to my mind somebody I once knew. But as there may be more than one Nadia Brasiloff, I did not say anything. You say that this person is no longer in your employ, so the subject only has a retrospective interest. However, I should have liked to see a photograph of her."

"You want to?"

"Yes. I suppose you haven't her portrait, so that I shall never be able to clear up the mystery."

Madame Brennoy thought for a moment. Suddenly she remembered that when looking over her son's room she had come across a photograph of Nadia, and had not burnt it.

"Wait a minute. I'll go and get you what you want."

She went out and came back with a large sepia print of Nadia with an attractive smile on her face. Monsieur Dassagny stood up and exclaimed:

"That's the lady!"

"You recognise the person that you were talking about?"

"Without a doubt. She would be about thirty."

"Yes."

"Very dark hair. Tzigane type?"

"Yes"

"The nose a little Roman?"

"Yes"

"No doubt about it Nadia Brasloff, exiled Russian. She was then twenty-two. A dancer who had escaped from Russia in 1919 or 1920."

Madame Brennoy, amazed, interrupted her friend's thoughts.

"What is it you are telling me, Edmond?"

Monsieur Dassagny put the photo on the table cloth, and with a sarcastic smile continued:

"I think, my dear Pauline, that you have behaved very wisely in not keeping this lady companion."

No, truly, I cannot imagine her in this old chateau, with its atmosphere of dignity and decorum, in the service of a lady like yourself. I hope you did not keep her long?"

Madame Brennoy did not dare to confess the truth. She murmured:

"Oh! no not very long."

"You were right. In a position of trust like that, I always think of an elderly sober-minded lady or a respectable widow, above any suspicions. But Nadia!"

The banker laughed heartily. Madame Brennoy, becoming anxious, exclaimed nervously:

"As a matter of fact, Edmond, what are you driving at?"

"At this, my dear Pauline. At this, which will edify you very much. I knew your ex-companion at Pera, in a house in one of those houses. You understand, don't you?"

"What are you talking about? Countess Brasiloff?"

"What? She became a Countess in France? Ah! yes . . . that's the idea. I suppose she talked to you about her palace at Moscow, her retinue of servants, her ancestors."

"Yes."

"The same old story. Alas! my dear, the pseudo countess sold her favours at Madame Danaclis's, a Levantine procuress who kept a very high class establishment. I am not calumniating anyone, I have been there!"

"Oh!"

"I have seen, on several evenings, with some friends of mine, the beautiful Nadia dance, almost naked, Moscovite dances to amuse the clients. . . . Mind you, I am not reproaching her. I know, alas! the tragic fate of these wretched victims of the Russian Revolution, and I should be the last person to throw a stone. It is very easy to say suicide rather than dishonour. Suicide for other people, especially when one has had a good dinner and is satisfied with life. Only I should have pictured the lady in question dancing in a cabaret rather than reading poems to a highly respectable *châtelaine* in a very proper household."

Monsieur Dassagny stopped. He looked at Madame Brennoy, and was surprised to see her so taken aback at this part of his disclosure.

He exclaimed jocularly:

"Come! come! Pauline. What's the matter? The details that I have given you about this woman are no longer very interesting. . . . Your reader

has left you; she has not taken your watch? No? So that's all right. You have for some time been associating closely with a woman with a shall we say, for the sake of politeness, with a very lurid past. Well, after all! What pretty woman has not had a few adventures in her past?"

.

When Monsieur Dassagny left in his car, Madame Brennoy remained alone in her drawing-room. Her expression was hardened by the resolution she had just taken. She had not forgotten a single word that her friend had said. Deep anger, such as she had never before felt, rose up within her. She ended by exclaiming, as though she were replying to some invisible person who had contradicted her

"Ah! No! no! This time it is too much!"

Hurriedly she rang the bell. The housemaid came

"Madame rang?"

"Tell Louis that I shall want the car to-morrow morning to go to Paris. I must start at nine o'clock. Pack my suitcase. I don't intend to be away for more than two days. I shall telephone you when to expect me back."

"Very good, Madame"

.

When she reached the Porte d'Orléans in Paris, Madame Brennoy went to Monsieur Sommier, her lawyer. She hoped to get her son's address, as she did not know it. Monsieur Sommier received

her with deference, as is usual with an important client.

"Monsieur André's address, Madame? But how is that?"

"Things are rather strained between us, my dear sir. He has gone off in a huff, and I have not had any news from him for three months."

"He is living at 207, Avenue Henri-Martin."

"What? In a flat?"

"Yes. Furnished."

"He is living all alone in a flat?"

The lawyer smiled.

"My dear Madame Brennoy, after what you call a huff, young people do not usually live alone. Monsieur André is living with a lady."

"Ah! He is living with her. Obviously my question was absurd. But I want you to inform me on an important point. It is several months since my son left me; I have cut off his supplies. Will you therefore, tell me on what the two of them are living? On love and kisses, I suppose?"

"That is more than I can tell you."

"Have you advanced him any money on his inheritance?"

"He has tried. But when he suggested it, I was obliged to make an unpleasant revelation. The settling up of Monsieur Brennoy's estate has been a long and difficult business. I have had to send back, through a Mexican bank, the Santa Cruz shares. All to no purpose. In short, the value of Monsieur André's estate will amount to about four hundred and fifty thousand francs, less taxes.

It is very far short of the five million that you expected for him "

"It is indeed very regrettable But if you have not been able to advance him anything, on what has he been living, he who is so extravagant and who has no idea of the value of money ? "

"I'm sure I don't know "

"Thank you, my dear sir I will go and see my son this afternoon and put things right "

Madame Brennoy got into her car and gave the chauffeur André's address She did not seem to be worried by the lawyer's information She thought, on the contrary, that she now had all the cards in her hand Her son had nothing very much to hope for from his father's estate And also Monsieur Dassagny's revelations would make him open his eyes He was at her mercy She was going to master him and take him home to Plessis Breau and, with great care, repair the damage of his foolish escapade

Her heart beat as she rang the bell The maid opened the door

"Monsieur André Brennoy, Mademoiselle ? "

"Yes, he's in, Madame But Monsieur cannot see you "

"If he is busy I will wait. "

"No, Madame, he is ill "

"What do you say ? "

"Monsieur had a serious fainting fit the day before yesterday I brought him to as best I could He is in bed I sent for the doctor and he ordered him to have a nurse I'll go and ask the nurse if she will allow you "

"Don't trouble, Mademoiselle. I am his mother. Take me to his room at once."

"Oh! forgive me, Madame. In that case, of course. This way, Madame."

Madame Brennoy passed through the sitting-room and went into the bedroom. Her son was asleep. The nurse got up and with decisive gestures signalled to the visitor to remain at the door. The maid made a sign to her and whispered:

"Madame is Monsieur's mother."

The nurse looked at Madame Brennoy and instantly becoming all affability, murmured:

"Oh, good afternoon, Madame. . . . Your son, I am happy to say, is asleep. We must be. . . ."

Madame Brennoy beckoned the nurse outside the room in order to question her.

"Who sent for you, Madame? What is your name?"

"Nurse Correz. Dr. Marigon telephoned for me yesterday."

"What exactly has happened?"

"Ah, well, it's like this. Monsieur has had some upset which brought on a fainting fit. Dr. Marigon attended him. Yesterday he spat up a good deal of blood. But that is getting better. He is sleeping. It is a good sign."

"Thank you, nurse. Remain in the sitting-room. I will go and sit by my son. I will wait by him till he awakes."

"But, Madame, the doctor has given me orders not to leave him."

"I shall be there, nurse Do as I tell you"

"Very well, Madame"

Without making the slightest noise, Madame Brennoy went back into the room The curtains were half drawn She sat down very quietly near her son's bed He was still sleeping With her fine batiste handkerchief she wiped away the tears which were falling down her cheeks.

XVII

For an hour Madame Brennoy watched her sleeping son. As the time passed it seemed to her that little by little she began to take possession of him and chase away the evil influence that had cast its spell over him for the last six months.

At length André awoke. He turned in his bed and did not pay any attention to the person who was sitting near him. He stretched himself and opened his eyes. Suddenly he made a movement of surprise, as if he could not believe his sight. He sat up, leaning on his elbow.

"Mother, it's you !"

"Yes, my darling, it is . . . go on sleeping if you are tired."

He fell back on his pillow and put out his hand to her. She covered it with kisses. He joked.

"This, mother, is a very well arranged *coup de théâtre*. I expected to find my good nurse's red mop, and who is it that I see ?"

Madame Brennoy was eager to know all the details of the accident. André explained what had happened. A wound had re-opened on the top of the left lung. He had spat blood. He was still very weak. At length she asked him :

"But, my poor boy, what was it made you faint ?"

"Listen, mother, I'll tell you the truth Nadia has gone away."

Madame Brennoy had great difficulty in hiding her delight

She controlled herself

"Gone away? What do you mean?"

"She has left me"

"Really? You're not saying that just to please me?"

"You can see whether I'm telling you the truth or not Go to that drawer over there. Take out that express letter Read it I got it on Sunday evening"

Madame Brennoy recognised Nadia's fine writing She tossed her head In one sense she was satisfied, in another she was puzzled by the phrase *You are obliged, in order to live, to have recourse to dangerous acts* She pointed it out to her son, with her finger

"What does she mean by that, my boy?"

"Oh! mother . . . you're not going to be cross with me Being at the end of my tether, I accepted on your behalf a bill at six months It is a matter of two hundred thousand francs"

"André you have done that!"

He made a gesture so weary, so disheartened, that she hastened to add:

"I am not reproaching you at all, my poor boy I am only too delighted at one thing, the disappearance of this woman"

"Ah, mother! You still have the same aversion towards her? If you knew how you hurt me when you speak like that Don't you see that I have

been so upset by her attitude, so fine, so noble. But there, don't let's talk of it any more. You have triumphed. You have won the battle. I am no longer the disobedient, bad son. You have no longer anything to reproach me with; we will continue the conversation that we began in October at Plessis-Bréau."

Madame Brennoy listened with rapturous delight to her son's dutiful words. She had come armed with arguments and good reasons, expecting a violent discussion. Her son's docility softened her. How could she doubt his sincerity? His fainting fit on Sunday was the best proof that what he said was true. She had another besides; Nadia's departure was exactly what she had expected. Disheartened, the Russian had gone to seek fresh adventures.

"I ought to tell you, mother," he continued, "that I had another serious shock the other day when I was told by the lawyer that my inheritance had shrunk to next to nothing."

"Alas! yes. He told me the same thing."

"You remember, you often said to me before my illness, 'Your father has left you five millions, with that you will have the time and means to choose what profession you like.' I have always counted on it. During my two years stay in Switzerland I did not worry, which is natural. Well, I find myself at twenty-three almost without a sou. It is an awful let down. It is worrying. It has upset me perhaps more even than my heartache. So, this is what I want to ask you. If you were an ideal mother, as you always have

been, you would make a little bargain with me I would hand over to you my rights as regards my father's inheritance. In exchange you would make over to me five millions."

André stopped, fatigued with having spoken for so long. Madame Brennoy was silent. She wanted to protest. But her son's words, spoken in such a soft voice, breathless from his illness, touched her heart. She was torn between reason that said no and maternal tenderness that said yes.

André went on:

"As a matter of fact, my dear mother, you wouldn't be doing much a bad piece of business. It is true that my father's shares in American Copper are only worth twelve dollars instead of a hundred and ten. But you are not forced to sell them. You can afford to wait. You are strong and well (Ah! the pitiful little remark touched the mother's heart). You can wait three or four years for another American boom. You will get a million and a half. With the five hundred thousand francs that are left thereabouts, I will give you two millions at more or less long term, against five millions right away. That will only cost you three millions. You can do that for me—and in addition I will promise to go back to Leysin in a few days. Dr. Schwer will put me right and then I will come back to you at Plessis Breau. I mean it. On my honour."

Madame Brennoy was silent. André put out his arm and stroked her hand and became still more pressing.

"Do this for me and make me happy

Should a young man of my age, that fate hinders from earning a living and gaining his independence, have to rely for ever for his pocket money on what his mother allows him? Come, mother dear. When one has only one son and one is sure that he will be buried before long."

"André!"

"Do you think I have any illusions about my illness? . . . So when one has an only child who is going down hill every day to the fatal precipice, money, well?"

"I beg you, my boy, don't talk like this. You upset me. Why, of course, I will do what you wish. I only want one thing: to know that as soon as possible you will go back to Dr. Schwer, the only person who can treat you as you should be treated after this accident."

"Ah! mother. You are good. There! You've made me feel better already by what you've said. It's quite true. I really feel better already."

"My dear boy. Why I would give you all I possess and deprive myself of everything to make you well quickly and completely."

There was a knock at the door. Two gentle taps. The nurse's red head appeared:

"Good, here's Judy!" murmured André, laughing.

"Do you require anything, Monsieur?"

"Yes. You've come at the right moment. My mother is staying here for a few days until I go to Switzerland. Help her to settle into her room."

"Very good, Monsieur."

The nurse tried not to show her annoyance.

She was extremely disappointed. She helped Madame Brennoy to unpack her suitcase, and when she had a chance she went and talked to the maid.

"What do you think? The mother is staying here. That's very annoying."

"You don't like invalids who have relations?"

"What do you suppose? It's the curse of my job. They come and find out whether you are sleeping at night in the arm-chair. They remind you of the medicine you have forgotten to give. With these sort of people one can never read the paper in peace or do a little knitting without being disturbed. They make our profession impossible, whilst invalids on their own—ah! that's all right. They can ring till they break their thumbs on the bell push, that's the idea. I have a friend who used to look after an old curmudgeon who was enough to drive one mad. She used to give him six sleeping cachets at eight o'clock whenever she wanted to go to the cinema."

"There must be some who are really very tiresome."

"I should think there are! By the way, do you know that your master intends to go to Switzerland very soon. I really have no luck. I thought this would be a good case for a month or six weeks at least. Bang! It's finished. Ah! well, well!"

Nurse Correz went back into Andre's room. She pretend-d to tidy up and sat down in the arm chair. She thought things over. She was trying to find some compensation for the short duration of the case. She fancied she would be able to take

advantage of the departure of the son and his mother to acquire two or three of Monsieur's ties (he had so many) as well as a few pairs of socks that she would give to her brother-in-law; not forgetting several new towels and a bottle of scent that she had noticed in the bathroom and intended to take for her own use. So, she wouldn't have altogether wasted her time with this ephemeral patient.

André moved in his bed. She asked :

"Did you call, Monsieur?"

"No thank you, nurse."

"I am here. If you need anything."

André had not exaggerated when he said that his mother's goodness had done more than anything else to make him better. He waited patiently for some days, the time necessary to get hold of the money, and to assure his mother of his submission. Three days later, he sent the following letter to Nadia at Milan :

My dearest Goloubka. Your sudden disappearance on Sunday was the most terrible shock I have ever had in all my life. I became unconscious, and since then have been in bed. I am not reproaching you, because you thought you were acting for the best. Your thoughtfulness, your fear of seeing the painful situation between my mother and myself continue, your scruples about my financial transactions, all this has touched me deeply! But at the same time I do not think you know of the despair into which your decision has plunged me!

Fortunately, I have news for you. Great news! I am reconciled with my mother. We have smoothed out our

disagreements I will explain all about it later when we meet For I am going back to Dr. Schuer's sanatorium at Leysin to get myself patched up Come to me there after January 25th I am counting the days, my adorable Nadioucha I send you showers of kisses, my loved one, in the only in the hope of seeing you again. You are more to me than ever Your Andre.

XVIII

DR. SCHWER showed Nadia into his consulting room. He motioned her to an armchair facing his desk, which was strewn with medical journals :

"Madame, do not be alarmed because I have asked you to spare me a few moments. This conversation is essential in the interests of the invalid under my care. If I may say so, in the absence of their families, my patients give me their confidence and look upon me as their counsellor and friend. Monsieur André Brennoy is no exception to the rule. The day he arrived here he opened his heart to me. He explained everything without any reserve. He told me, in fact, of his great desire to marry you."

"It is both his desire and mine, doctor."

"Very good, Madame. It was my duty first of all to explain to my patient that his present condition did not permit him to think of that. I told him so. I found myself face to face with an irrevocable decision which brooked no contradiction and allowed of no delay. In these circumstances it only remained for me to advise him to wait at least a month. For I hope that in a month his condition being improved, he will be able to leave my house once more."

"You think so?"

"I hope so. Besides four weeks delay are

necessary for him to realise his desire. You will be married at the end of February. It is, therefore, to the future Madame André Brennoy that I am speaking now."

"I am listening, doctor."

"You are not ignorant, Madame, of the state in which your fiancé is!"

"Alas!"

"You know that, in spite of an apparent improvement, his case is very serious. I am, therefore, obliged to speak to you as a doctor. It is, indeed, on that ground alone that I take the liberty of interfering. You are going to marry an invalid, Madame, an invalid who loves you to such an extent that if you had not responded to his call I should have been extremely anxious on his account. As regards this invalid, when you become his wife it will be necessary to treat him with extreme care, unless you wish to hasten his end. I must not hide from you the fact that a man in his state is very delicate, and if you were to abuse that which is natural between healthy couples, you would sign his death warrant. You must exercise the greatest care, as is incumbent upon a devoted wife in such circumstances. You must be extremely moderate."

"I understand you perfectly, doctor. You may be sure that I shall take great care of my husband. It is very kind of you to put me on my guard in these matters, and I promise that I shall not disappoint you."

"Then I know you have taken my remarks in good part and have understood the reason of my intervention. You forgive me, don't you?"

"On the contrary, I am grateful to you. And now, may I see our dear invalid?"

"With pleasure. Make yourself at home here. Your companionship will help him to bear the boredom of his three weeks on a couch. I will show you to his room."

Nadia went to the balcony, where André was finishing his siesta. The sun was gilding the panorama of the mountain peaks, and the dead silence of the snows was conducive to peaceful contemplation. Nadia sat near the couch and took André's hand.

"So, darling, the doctor told you the great secret?"

"Do not talk too much, Dédé . . . or at any rate speak quietly so as not to over-tire yourself."

"What did he say to you?"

"He's a charming man. He approves of our marriage. He is very pleased about it. It can take place in a month's time."

"Husband and wife?"

"Yes, Dédé. And he has also advised us to be very careful, both of us."

"Of course. I understand, we must live like anchorites. It's all very well for him to talk like that. He . . . He's sixty-three! . . . But not for me. I feel much better already. In three weeks we'll get away and be married at the consulate at Lausanne. You have your residential papers?"

"Yes."

"Good. That's all right. Ah! my *Golonbka*.

What happiness to think that after this awful time we are going to be united, and this time for ever I was so afraid that I had lost you I was like a wrecked ship at sea "

"Don't think of that any more, dear It is over Think rather of the future which smiles on us "

"Yes, let's make out plans I love doing that First of all, I must tell you that I have received a notice from the Paris Bank of the transfer of my account to the *Credit Suisse* "

"Darling Details about money do not interest me "

"Forgive me ! Forgive me ! But we must go into those matters I've already told you that we are marrying under the system of separate estates You, you will have four millions capital—I am going to place that amount to your own personal account This money, as will be stated in the contract, will be yours absolutely Do you follow ? "

"Yes ! Yes ! You are an angel, but why do it ? "

"I am anxious that you should not have worrying times with me like we have had That's why I am doing it You will have your own money As for myself, as you know, I've no need of these millions Mother is rich enough for both of us When this is done, we shall get married on February 28th The date suits you ? "

"It's a Friday "

"Venus's day, that's lucky We will leave the same day for Paris, where we shall spend our first

wedding night. We must make a night of it. . . . Nadioucha ? Do something er——eh ? ”

Andrés expression lit up at once. He gazed lovingly at Nadia like a poor hungry boy in front of a pastry cook's window. She bent over him and, caressing his hand murmured, coaxingly :

“ Leave it to me, darling. I've got an idea, already.”

“ Tell me.”

“ No. A surprise. You will see.”

Nadia's eyes sparkled. Their strange fascination moved her fiancé once more. They shone like an invisible flame. He replied under his breath :

“ I am already thrilled ; I long to take you once more in my arms. But it is necessary to be careful. I want to become the lover I used to be. Now tell me about our lovely times to come my *Goloubka*. Tell me—tell me——”

“ You want to find the little naiad who bathed at night in the Mediterranean in your arms once again ? ”

“ Oh ! yes.”

“ You have not grown tired of me ? ”

“ Oh ! no.”

“ You still love my perfume ? ”

“ Yes. I am mad about it.”

Nadia whispered her questions in the invalid's ear. She gripped his fingers between hers. Again she whispered close into his ear :

“ Then would you love to see me once more in my *ninon* slip with black lace that I wore that first evening at Jaun-les-Pins ? I have bought a darling one in a lemon shade.”

" Ah ! Nadioucha, I see it already "

" Shut your eyes, dearest. Do not tire yourself just listen to the secrets of your little wife, who is mad with delight at the idea of living once more with you those unforgettable moments. Listen, during my short stay at Lausanne, to obtain my certificate of residence, I have met Gladys, a friend of mine who is bored to death, all alone in Switzerland. As we were not able to stroll about for ever by the lake of Geneva, we talked to one another in our adjoining rooms. She is a charming English girl, and we photographed each other "

Her voice became inaudible except to André. You will forgive me my moments of naughtiness won't you, Dédé ? "

" Of course. Where are the photos ? Show me them quickly ! "

" I got them the day before yesterday. I will show you them later "

" Ah ! Nadioucha, how amusing you are ! How can I ever tire of you ? Go on with your stories, my darling. Go on ! Go on ! "

André lent on his elbow and listened greedily like a happy child, who open-mouthed, listens to the wonders of a charming fairy story. But the fairy stories of grown up children are told by *Volupté*, that capricious and fantastic fairy godmother who in turn amuses and corrupts us to the top of her bent by her frivolousness. André listened to Nadia. Her inventive brain satisfied his amorous fancies. He never tired of listening to the siren who, with diabolical art, wove around him a net which suggested the alluring thrills in the future.

XIX

THEY were married. The consul, performing the function, consecrated their union on Friday the 28th of February at ten o'clock. They had hurriedly packed their luggage and had very nearly missed the express which would land them at the Gare de Lyon at ten-fifty in the evening.

Seated opposite each other they counted the hours. André looked at Nadia and murmured :

" Good morning, Madame Brennoy."

And Nadia replied :

" Good morning, my husband."

Her gaiety was not forced. Fortune, with her gold stopped teeth, like a mad old witch had smiled on her at last. Friday, the 28th of February, had made up for thirteen years of misery, of distress, of numberless ordeals of undeserved failures. The poor emigrant, with a tortured past, was at length rewarded for her tenacity of purpose. Kindness and riches crowned her efforts. Nadia wanted to dance for joy in the carriage, to shout aloud her satisfaction to the travellers sleeping in their arm-chair seats. All the morning her nerves had been strung up. Like an athlete nearing the winning post who lets himself go all out seeing victory within reach. Three times, unobserved by André, she had opened her bag to glance furtively at, and touch the bank papers in their large yellow envelope :

her receipt for the deposit of eight hundred and three thousand, six hundred Swiss francs, her new cheque book, the list of stocks and shares recommended to increase her capital Married, and a millionairess! Could it be possible?

Her mind went back to her room at Plessis Bréau, where, weary of living with Madame Brennov, she made her plans This son she had never seen who was always being talked about, this "good catch" who was marked out for someone else and whom she coveted, though she had not much hope, he was there, sitting opposite to her, her husband her prize

The train entered a tunnel She had a childish longing to put her hand once more into her bag, lying on the little table, the material proof of her riches Whilst she was touching it, she felt a hand squeezing hers Andre's hand It gave her a shock Ah! yes Her husband was there, opposite For a moment she had entirely forgotten his existence

She answered his squeeze The train came out of the tunnel Andre's bright eyes were awaiting the re-appearance of her beloved face from the darkness

'Nadioucha. It is five o'clock. We are getting near Paris Tell me now what you want to do for our wedding night'

"Not yet, Dedé. Let me keep it as a surprise"

"Where shall we go?"

"Ah well, all I can tell you is that first to the Avenue Henri Martin Bath, change our clothes Then the mystery begins"

"You make my mouth water, Nadia."

"Be patient, darling, and this evening we are going to pour over the foreword of a rare book whose exciting pages we shall decipher together."

The taxi pulled up at a badly lighted cul-de-sac in the rue Lepic. André and Nadia got out. She stopped at a glass door at the end of a passage lit by rose coloured light.

"Wait a minute, dear. Is this number 3? Yes. I don't think I'm making a mistake. Do you remember the story that our friends the Rabeillacs told us?"

"Oh! yes. Their visit to Madame Hermance?"

"Yes, that was it."

"What an amusing idea! We must find the house."

"Ring at number 3."

A woman in black, a parlour maid very made-up came to the door.

"Monsieur and Madame, what do you want?"

"To speak to Madame Hermance."

"Madame Hermance is busy talking to a gentleman. If Monsieur will wait in the small sitting-room on the first floor, she will not be long."

Nadia and André sat down in a tiny room which looked out on to the courtyard. A red sofa stained with wine, worn at the corners; a bronze Diana with a roguish smile which seemed to reprimand a too curious Acteon; two suggestive engravings; a dusty doll, a souvenir from a cabaret; a little framed photograph of a dragoon adjutant with his tall helmet and moustache, very typical of 1905,

completed the adornment of this classic waiting-room

Nadia looked at André with a knowing glance and a sly smile. Her husband chuckled.

"I find this killing."

"Then you're not annoyed?"

"You're joking, surely. Do you take me for a country bumpkin? No, but really Nadia, look at that non-commissioned officer with his flower pot helmet!"

"Ssh! someone's coming."

Madame Hermance appeared. Small, grey-haired, quietly dressed without powder or paint. She was wearing black silk mittens and an agate locket on a gold chain, the locket contained her darling niece Clotilde's hair, cut off when she took the veil at twenty-two. And in a burst of confidence Madame Hermance, simpering modestly, said

"My niece belongs to a religious order. Me, I keep a house of convenience . . . that balances up the family."

With her usual graciousness, she bowed to her visitors and made excuses.

"I ask pardon for keeping you waiting, Monsieur, Madame. I was with one of our regular clients who had not finished looking at an album that I had given him. My God, some men are nuisances! They are not capable of amusing themselves right away, with anything. Not at all. They want details. Is she married? Widow of a civil servant? Actress or a lady of no importance? Does she often come to your house? Is she fond

of dark or fair men? Does she like a he-man or does she prefer someone very refined? Ah! heavens! All this bunkum and palaver to come to the same old thing! But don't let's bother about that. To whom am I indebted for the honour of your visit?"

"Our friends the Rabeillacs recommended us."

"Good, very good. Monsieur and Madame Rabeillac. A charming couple. Ah! they don't come slinking in the shadows or trying to disguise themselves as clods of earth so as to pass unnoticed. They have the courage of their convictions, they have!"

Nadia cut in with:

"Listen, Madame Hermance. My husband and I."

"Ah, you are newly married?"

"Yes . . . very newly. . . . And we want to enjoy ourselves at your house, this evening. Well, our friends told us that you have, amongst others, an artiste who recites poetry."

"Wait a moment. You have come at the right time, for I have also three society ladies who have been having a conversation with very distinguished gentlemen. They were just going home."

"We must invite them to have a glass of champagne with us," André suggested.

"That's a good idea! In the meantime I'll send for Madame Rose Sylba, the lady who recites verses. Leave that to me. I will arrange an entertaining little seance. Come along."

Madame Hermance stopped André at the door and whispered in his ear:

"Excuse me, Monsieur It will be three hundred francs for each of these ladies and two hundred for Madame Sylba, not including the champagne "

"That's all right, Madame Hermance "

He went with Nadia into a weird room which had a catafalque, an aquarium and mad cubist decoration The curtains and the carpet were black. The sofa blood red The electric lights, covered with green silk, gave a submarine effect Nadia and André sat in a corner and lit cigarettes

In the meantime, Madame Hermance had gone to warn the three "society " women, who were having coffee in the private room! She told them confidentially

"My dear little kittens, I have a nice saucer of milk for you A newly married couple, quite up to-date, who want to have an amusing evening You can miss your last train It's a bit of luck "

"Country people? "

"No Society folk—very modern, you know "

"Good We li have fun "

Madame Hermance introduced them with the airs and graces of a dowager

"Monsieur, Madame, allow me to present my friends—Mesdames Daisy, Periwinkle and Pæony—I think it's nice to hide identities of highly born people under the names of flowers "

Madame Daisy was a little dressmaker in the rue Caulaincourt, who, in the off season had recourse to the kind offices of Madame Hermance to supplement her budget She was fair, well proportioned and pleasant in manner Madame Periwinkle, the

widow of a civil servant, paid Madame Hermance a visit when her tradesmen's bills exceeded her income. Small and dark, with turned up nose and lips too red. Madame Pæony, a provincial lady staying in Paris, married to a tradesman in Nantes, came up regularly every three months to get by degrees at Madame Hermance's, the squirrel fur that she had set her heart on and that her husband, who was rather mean, had obstinately refused to give her. Like a re-incarnated Ruben's lady, she offered her abundant charms to those who disliked scragginess.

Madame Hermance clapped her hands :

"And now let us have a drink ! Mireille, bring us some champagne and start the music."

The ice was broken as soon as the cork popped. The valse from *The Count of Luxembourg* gave the conversation a more intimate character.

"Chatter away, my children," said Madame Hermance, "whilst Madame Sylba gets ready."

Then, bending over Nadia, she explained :

"Sylba is my own idea. I have noticed that many gentlemen are greatly affected by poetry and love romanticism. It is for these dilettanti that I have engaged Sylba. You will see, she reads Baudelaire in a coffin. The sweetest little thing !"

Madame Sylba appeared and bowed like a virtuoso as he opens the grand piano before attacking the *Second Rhapsody*. She had taken off the black veil which hid the coffin and sat in it with her legs, in black stockings, hanging out. Her bust was swathed in crepe. She was wearing a white velvet mask and a hat in the 1830 style

of Mimi Pinson. It was at the same time romantic, fantastic and disconcerting.

She began -

La femme cepeodant, de sa bouche de fraise,
En se tordant ainsi qu'un serpent sur la braise
Et pétrissant ses seins sur le fer de son busc,
Laisait couler ces mots tout imprégnés de musc.

As the recitation lasted a long time, Madame Hermance said to André, in order to keep up the conversation.

"It prepares the atmosphere, doesn't it? I have amongst my clicots a melancholy man as sad as a cemetery who becomes excited and nervy when he hears the *Charogne*. It's just what I said to a literary man who comes every now and then to see Madame Pérooy—he loves plump women and has had his fill of scraggy ones as his wife is almost a skeleton—I said to him: Literature isn't of very much use except that it always acts like a medicine. And verses which are a little indecent are better than all the 'aprodissais'. Ah, well, Monsieur, the gentleman looked at me as though I'd said something dreadful. But, ssh! Listen to that. Isn't that 'the goods'?"

Madame Sylba had finished her poem. She came to the table and swallowed a glass of champagne in a twinkling. Then she whispered to Periwinkle:

"My dear, there's a nail in the coffin which catches me on my *corryx*. I must tell Madame Hermance to have it knocked down or I shan't be able to sit in comfort."

She had whispered this judicious remark and, a slave to duty, went and sat down in the bier, but not without slipping a little red silk cushion underneath her. She continued her declamation :

Je suceraï, pour noyer ma rancœur,
Le népentès et la bonne ciguë
Aux bouts charmants de cette gorge aiguë
Qui n'a jamais emprisonné de cœur.

There was a knock at the door. The painted waiting-maid came in and muttered something. Madame Hermance made a sign to Madame Sylba to stop :

"What is it, Mireille ?"

"Madame. It's the Princess."

"Oh ! her, again !"

"What Princess ?" asked Nadia with curiosity.

"One of these rich eccentrics who come here in search of unusual sensations. I admit that I am a little fed up with this sort of amateur. They set a bad example to our clients. They upset the house generally. Last year, for example, I allowed a society lady, very good family, to come and work as a volunteer for the honour and glory of the thing. Well, there, Madame, I could have kicked myself. She was a nuisance. She poked her nose where she had no business. She looked through key holes. She wanted to run the whole place. She also sent me a rich old man from Orleans who went to such lengths that we had difficulty in bringing him back to life. I had to ask her not to come any more."

"Oh! for once let the Princess come in I'll ask her to take a glass of champagne with us"

"Very well, if it will please you, I will Mireille, tell the lady to come up"

The Princess came in A Manet touched up by Marie Laurencin Auburn hair with a thick fringe over the eyebrows, a pale face, eyes as black as two velvet buttons on cream silk She spoke French with a curious indefinable accent. She put every one at their ease by kissing Madame Sylba on the lips, patting Periwinkle's and Daisy's cheeks and drinking good luck to the newly married couple, sprinkling champagne on Prooy's opulent bosom

"She is charming," murmured Nadia, leaning over to Madame Hermance.

"Yes She's the life and soul of any party She breaks all the crockery She throws her stockings and her *releve buste* out of the window when she's had one over the eight and she makes all sorts of side splitting jokes You should see her at three o'clock in the morning Owing to her I've had trouble with the police But she's a good sort all the same And is really kind hearted When Mireille's little girl had scarlatina she paid the doctor's bill and the chemist's and everything She even sent her own doctor, a handsome fair man, who never forgot it Look at her What is she doing now? Up to some new trick Why, if she isn't"

Two o'clock The sombre saloon has become the scene of a mad orgy Madame Sylba has ceased

to recite. She is taking part in the proceedings. Six women and a man, shout, sing, joke and dance wildly round ten empty bottles. Mireille changes the records. Daisy and Periwinkle have taken off their dresses to dance with more freedom. Madame Sylba sits with her hands on her thighs, like a wrestler's, and tells indecent stories in her deep husky voice. Nadia and the Princess, who became intimate from the very first, are drinking out of the same glass. André, intoxicated by the champagne and the over-heated, exotic atmosphere, which makes even the roses droop in their vases, is revelling in every minute of this wildly riotous night.

Daring follows daring. Libertinage grows in a crescendo. Suddenly the Princess, to whom Nadia has imprudently confessed that it was her wedding night, stands up, her hair all dishevelled, and makes a suggestion :

"My children, I've got an idea. It is our young friends' wedding night. Let us celebrate it according to the ancient Greek rites. You shall be the Vestales and I will be the high priestess of the ceremony."

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A nightmare of a wedding night, in this room draped in black, with its coffin a sinister sign of approaching death.

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The château of Plessis-Bréau is asleep. The wind howls through the bare branches of the trees. Madame Brennoy, alone in her room, is reading.

Her mother's heart is full. Her son has written to her that he will soon be leaving the sanatorium. He will soon come to her who, by dint of her gentle persuasion and kind but firm authority, will preserve him from harm.

XX

ANDRÉ woke up. He was weary and tired after fifteen hectic nights in succession, of which the evening at Madame Hermance's had only been the prelude. He was tired, but happy. He realised that he was playing havoc with his health, but he did not regret it. His wife orchestrated, like a famous maestro, the rhapsody of his desires.

He woke up. He was astonished not to find Nadia beside him. He turned over and called out :

"What ! You're up already . . . darling ?"

"Yes. To let you see this little surprise."

Nadia, in slippers and an eau-de-nil dressing gown, pointed to an object about three feet high standing on the table covered with a piece of cloth. André looked at it with curiosity.

"Whatever is it, Nadioucha ?"

"It is my wedding present, Dédé. I told you that I should be a little late in thanking you for that magnificent emerald that you put on my little finger. I've at last found what I want to give you. It arrived this morning."

"It looks like a statue."

"It is. And we are going to have the unveiling ceremony now."

Slowly, looking slyly out of the corner of her eye, Nadia took off the cloth. The marble appeared

little by little, in its dazzling whiteness, to André's astonished eyes

"What a superb goddess! Who is it supposed to be?"

"The sculptor calls his work: *Passion Lighting the World*. He is a friend of mine—Daniel Roubiac. The original is going to the Salon, and he has made me a small replica in marble. Don't you think it is admirable?"

The divinity stood there in the pale splendour of her nudity. Her right hand raised upwards towards the sky held the last veil that she had just taken off her foot on a rock, she gazed at the world, her head raised, her mouth with a trembling expression. She seemed to cry out to the whole universe her right to enjoyment, from beginning to end, her indisputable right to pleasure, even though it kills, to the delight of the moment even when one will not awake from its pernicious effects. She seemed to affirm with brazen assurance that the world of the flesh is the only one which shines forth and triumphs above the network of falsehoods under which true humanity struggles. *Passion eternal*, which slays and languishes, imperious and prophetic she cast a glance, whilst she raised on high her little look into space, clenched hand.

André, pensively, looked at it from his bed.

"What do you think of it, darling?" asked Nadia.

Then, as she was about to ring for the housemaid to help her to put it in place, he prevented her with a gesture. "Don't move, Nadia. Do you know that she is something like you?"

"Oh! Do you think so?"

"Wait. Take the same pose beside her."

Nadia obeyed. Nude, her foot on a stool, her right arm raised, her hand holding the crêpe de chine garment, she enjoyed copying the attitude of the marble goddess. André compared them. Although Nadia had certainly not inspired the sculptor, there were certain similarities between them. Above all the sensuality of the two mouths and the strange laughing look.

"It is you, my *Goloubka*. It is as though this divinity in stone had transmitted to you all her seduction. You are my little *Eternal Passion*, my own. You are *Passion* who influences my thoughts, my nerves, my flesh and blood."

"Dédé!"

"Nadioucha! You are my adorable fairy, and I don't know which I love most, the perfume of your body or the marvels of your imagination."

XXI

AUNT BERTIE, who was in Paris, had received an urgent telegram from Madame Brennoy asking her to come to Plessis-Bréau. She tore herself, not without regret, from the pleasure of writing a new cantata entitled *Flocons, dansez flocons!* and she took the train to Tours.

Hardly had she arrived at the château when, to her astonishment, she found her sister walking up and down, like a lion in a cage, in the large drawing-room on the ground floor.

"How are you, Pauline? I have come as soon as . . ."

"Ah! there you are."

"But, what's the matter?"

"I feel as if I were going mad. No! I swear to you it is beyond anything that I could have imagined. André! my darling . . . André!"

"Well, well—what is it?"

"André is married."

"Dear me. What an idea . . . and so sudden?"

"Wait. Who do you think he married?"

"How should I know?"

"Nadia Brasiloff."

"Your former companion!"

"Yes. That terrible creature."

"Come—come—I don't understand your annoyance. Your Nadia was a pearl. Now she is a

horrible creature. Do you reproach your son for making a misalliance? However, he has married a devoted, gentle, affectionate woman. It seems to me that money is no object. He is rich enough for . . ."

Madame Brennoy, who had not been listening to her sister, cut in afresh :

"Oh, be quiet; you don't know the truth, my dear. I'll tell you, exactly. I recently learnt that this Nadia is an adventuress of the worst type, a mere woman of . . . You understand what I mean by a mere woman? Yes, Berthe, a woman who frequented bad houses at Constantinople. Can you realise it? I sent her away because she was after André. If things had remained like that it would not have been so bad. But the poor boy is in love with her. They met one another again at the sanatorium, and they were married at Lausanne."

"How do you know?"

"André has just written to me from Paris. He says he is married, and as he feels very tired, asks if I can have them here. Can you imagine such a thing! The two of them, his wife and himself . . . here! . . . at the château!"

"It's incredible!"

"Mind you, if he had suddenly married a decently brought up young woman, even though she had been poor, I should have been the first to rejoice about it. But to marry this horrible creature, who has not only led a disreputable life abroad, but has but one object in marrying him: to get his money. It's madness. It's suicide, Berthe, because

the woman holds him entirely by her physical attraction, and she will kill him . . . oh!"

Madame Brennoy, overcome, sank back on a settee. Her sister tried to comfort her:

"Pauline. Come, Pauline."

"He is lost, Berthe. My poor boy is lost. Oh! it's terrible. I'm in despair."

"Come, Pauline. I'm sure you are exaggerating things."

Madame Brennoy was weeping:

"No—but no—I've told you—Dr. Schwer came and warned me last June. It is essential for him to live most carefully if he is to prolong his poor life, which is in danger. He has fallen into the clutches of this woman. He's lost."

"I'm sure you overestimate the danger. If this woman loves him, whatever her past has been, she will look after him."

"My instinct tells me that all she cares for is his money. And he writes to me that they are coming, the two of them, and that I was wrong in putting her into my black books and that I am not fair to her. The poor boy does not know about her past and does not suspect anything. What can I do, my God?"

"You can't shut him out of your house. He will not come without her. You cannot open his eyes to his wife's imperfections. That would be worse than all."

"Advise me what to do, Berthe. I am so unhappy. Oh! how I am suffering. If you knew."

Her sister hesitated:

"Listen, Pauline. Your son is no longer a child

He is married. You must receive his wife, no matter what she is. If you refuse, you will only make matters worse. You will force André more than ever into Nadia's arms. She will pose as the victim of an unjust and hostile mother-in-law. She will make a martyr of herself, and your son will blame you for your attitude."

"So?"

"So, you can only bottle up your anger. If your son was strong and normal, you might act very differently. As it is, the poor boy's health compels you to take care. If he wants to come here it is because he feels ill. How can you receive the husband without his wife?"

Madame Brennoy sighed sadly.

"Exactly—what you say is true. But it is hard to have to receive in your house a woman you don't trust and that you know is your enemy."

"I should say that having your son under your roof you have a better chance of watching over him, of checking his follies; in a word, of shielding him from his own waywardness. Do you follow me?"

"Yes. You are very sensible, my dear."

"You realise it yourself, dear sister?"

"I shall do as you say. But I repeat, it is very hard. Ah, yes. This common adventuress. His wife! Oh!"

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The return of André to Plessis-Bréau was, in truth, for Madame Brennoy a heart-aching business. When she saw the couple enter the hall and when

she had put her arms round her darling son, the real ordeal began.

Nadia was there smiling; one of those smiles which indicate a secret triumph, a revenge realised, a smile which wounded Madame Brennoy more than a definitely hostile attitude. André turned to his mother

"Mother—Nadia is my wife—the past is buried for ever. You two have had some little differences, but we will forget and think no more about them. I want you to make it up at once, without any ill feeling. It will make me so happy. Come, mother! Kiss your daughter-in-law. And you, Nadia, put your arms around mother."

Madame Brennoy had need of all her self-control not to protest. André had said "You have had some little differences, you two." That showed how little he appreciated the position. He apportioned the blame equally! This lack of understanding, this injustice on the part of the invalid, made her indignant. She was even more outraged by the hypocritical and almost patronising attitude of the woman whose look seemed to say "Come. I forgive you, old lady. For I have won the first round."

Madame Brennoy was about to give vent to her rage when the recollection of her sister Berthe's wise advice checked her. Her calvary commenced, but she was ready to suffer for her son's sake, for the one thing in the world that she loved, for the sake of his life, her invalid son.

Nadia kissed her dutifully. Madame Brennoy brushed her cheek under André's watchful eyes.

Happy, blind, without the slightest idea of all that his poor mother was sacrificing for him.

The young couple occupied André's beautiful room, with its large canopied bed, and its lofty windows that gave on to the park. The tragedy-comedy of this occupation! The irony of Fate, that invisible taunting power which seemed to be enjoying the drama which had begun; a drama in which serious and comic scenes followed one another as though to demonstrate once again that Einstein's theory of relativity descends from the interstellar spaces to play havoc with the prejudices of humanity.

In the servants' quarters the news of the marriage of the son of the house of Brennoy with the countess had been received with giggles and chuckles, oh's and ah's. Amelia, first with the information, had rushed panting into the huge kitchen, large as a barrack-room. She had exclaimed to Marthe:

"Madame Marthe! Madame Marthe. What do you think? The mistress's son has married Nadia. They are coming here at noon."

The cook let a bowl of the white-of-egg drop on the floor:

"Monsieur André . . . married her . . . I don't think! In a taxi, yes! But not at the Registry Office!"

"No! No! Married legally. The companion is Madame Brennoy now."

The scullerymaid, who was peeling potatoes, stood stock still with her knife in the air and her mouth wide open. Edgar, coming up the cellar steps, muttered between his teeth:

"Well, mark my words That's going to lead to trouble"

And Louis, the chauffeur, when he was told, exclaimed under his breath -

"Lord bless my soul—that trollop coming back—then my number's up"

André had not thought of these little details But Nadia, on her triumphant return, had foreseen everything And that was one of her secret enjoyments. Her victory would crush her old friend Pauline, it was true But she would also get the better of all her hostile and bitter enemies in the house Ah! she would make them pay for their malicious prognostications, their sly shoulder shruggings and their contemptuous insinuations

The first opportunity soon came Whilst Louis was taking up her expensive trunks and bags and putting them into her room, Nadia said, with a commanding air

"Louis, put my trunks down a little more carefully Do you hear?"

In what a cutting voice she had spoken to him! And when André rang for Edgar to unfasten his trunks, with what lofty and distant air she said to him

"When you have finished with Monsieur, kindly clean my riding boots and polish my spurs, attend to the tap in my dressing room, it does not work, and just look in the car and see if I left my cigarette holder on the ash tray *That is all that Madame la Comtesse requires to-day*"

She had not forgotten Edgar's sarcastic fare-

well when he had brought up the last lunch to the dismissed lady companion in her room.

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Madame Brennoy had sent to find Aunt Berthe so that she might be present at the first lunch. She needed her sister's moral support to help her to get acclimatised. What a meal ! Whilst André, Nadia and Aunt Berthe were talking, Madame Brennoy was watching her son. He had lost another two or three pounds. How sunken were his eyes ! What an unnatural lustre in his gaze ! What weariness in his gestures, in his bearing ; when he was not trying to attune himself to Nadia's note ! She, on the other hand, was gay, thoughtless, and quite at her ease. She talked to the aunt about her husband, with the familiarity of an old friend. And when Aunt Berthe addressed her as Madame, Nadia protested with excessive amiability :

" Oh ! not ' Madame.' Come, Aunt Berthe. Call me simply Nadia. I am your niece. Isn't that so, dear mother ? "

Madame Brennoy shuddered, as if a stinging wasp had struck her ear. Dear mother ! She called her dear mother ! Instantly Monsieur Dassagny's disclosures sprang to her mind, that friend who had most probably bought, along with many others, the smiles of her daughter-in-law. She gazed with infinite tenderness, with tragic pity, at André, who from time to time gently caressed his wife's hand and looked at her with glances that betrayed the depth of their intimacy.

The fruit was served ; large strawberries lying

on a bed of white cotton wool As Edgar handed round the castor sugar, Nadia called out

"No, not that sugar for André He prefers the crystallised There used to be some in the silver sugar basin Over there"

"There is no more, Madame"

Then Nadia turned to Madame Brennoy .

"You must see that some is bought, dear mother This sugar is bad for my husband"

Then she added with an angelic smile

"You will please be kind and remember it. The health of our André before everything"

Now she was teaching her mother in law ! She was pretending to know better than her what was good for the invalid Sooo she would give her orders to the servants Madame Brennoy was on the point of replying Then she thought that Nadia had made her remarks in such a sweet way, in such a persuasive voice, with such a desire to please her husband that a reprimand was out of the question André would not understand his mother's attitude and would reproach her Besides, he exclaimed suddenly, calling his aunt to bear witness

"There ! You see how the pretty little tyrant takes care what I eat What do you think, auntie, of this adorable nurse ?"

Madame Brennoy hurried the lunch over She went to her room, whilst the coffee was served in the drawing room Her hands were trembling, her throat was dry She sat down before her toilet table She picked up a bottle, at hazard, and threw it violently on the floor Her nerves were strained

beyond bearing. She looked at her care-worn face in the mirror and burst into tears.

Someone came quietly into the boudoir. It was Aunt Berthe. She put her arms round her sister's neck and consoled her :

"My dear sister. I understand what you feel. It's hard. What a performer this woman is ! But what can you expect ? André is mad about her. That is as clear as daylight. The poor boy's soul is no longer his own. You must not say anything. You must keep silent, Pauline. If you told him what you know, you would kill him at once. So be quiet. Violence can do no good in a case like this. Come, dry your tears. Powder your face. And do not let this woman know that she is making you suffer."

Madame Brennoy pulled herself together. Her calvary continued. She dabbed her cheeks with her powder puff. She got up. Her sister gave her a cigarette :

"Take that. Light it. . . . It will help to hide things."

They returned to the drawing-room. André was kissing his wife on the neck as she gave him his coffee. He called out with delight :

"That's all right. Mother and aunt. We need not mind them, darling."

Aunt Berthe took the cup that Nadia gave her with the grace of a well-brought-up young girl. Then it was Madame Brennoy's turn. Nadia looked at her. Her sharp eye at once saw that she had been crying in her room ; that powder had been hurriedly been put on her tear-stained face.

With the charming ferocity of a panther which puts out its claws to pounce, she asked quietly :

" Oh ! how red your eyelids are ! "

Madame Brennoy gave an evasive smile and, pointing to her lighted cigarette, replied :

" Oh, it's nothing. A little smoke in my eyes."

XXII

"You are very weary, my poor boy! Your cough is tiresome. Don't you think it would be wiser to sleep by yourself? You would rest better. Your wife would be very comfortable in the Empire room."

"Why, mother? Why do you want her to leave me at night? She looks after me."

Madame Brennoy sighed:

"Too well, alas!"

"But we are married, aren't we?"

"Listen, André. There are some subjects that a mother hardly dares to talk about to her son. However, in certain instances it is necessary to speak frankly. Let me tell you that your wife does not consider you as she ought to do. See what a state you are in! I so rarely get a chance of talking to you alone that I am obliged to seize a few minutes from time to time, as this evening."

"Mother, do not find fault. What are you worrying about? Because we are very fond of each other?"

"I am worrying because she is—how shall I say—too affectionate. You know what I mean."

"She loves me. It is quite natural that she should."

"Yes, but if she really loved you, as you say, she

would take care not to endanger your health. You are not strong and well."

"The truth is, mother dear, you have not buried the hatchet. You still have a grudge against her. Can't you, once and for all, forget your grievance against poor Nadia, who has been unfortunate enough to annoy you? Is it because we were together before our marriage? Is that really such a terrible crime?"

Madame Brennoy listened to her son. But she could not answer him. There she was, powerless before the poor consumptive, whose condition was growing worse each week, and she had to keep to herself all she knew, all that she had found out regarding Nadia's duplicity. She grieved over André's illness and over his blindness, that nothing now could cure. She felt as though she were standing on the edge of a dangerous shore, watching her son walking to quicksands and being gradually swallowed up by them.

She tried once more:

"Come, my dear. Why don't you have separate rooms? When you are better, when you are stronger . . ."

André cut in. He raised his voice:

"Ah! no mother. Leave me alone, with your old woman's remedies. Separate rooms! You are absurd!"

The door opened. Nadia, who had finished writing letters in the library, came back to their room. She looked at Madame Brennoy with great surprise. She stared at her without saying a word, but with an expression that obviously suggested:

"What has this person been doing here in our room? What audacity! How indiscreet!"

Madame Brennoy had nothing more to say. She wished her son good-night. But Nadia remarked:

"Oh! I don't want to be in the way. If you two want to say anything, I will go out."

"Why no, Nadia!" André protested. "Stay."

"You were having a very animated discussion, I thought."

"It is over. Isn't it, mother?"

"Yes. Good-night."

Madame Brennoy went out. It was only ten o'clock in the evening. She began to arrange the ornaments in the drawing-room. A quarter of an hour later she was checking the contents of a glass case full of eighteenth century snuff boxes, when the door opened. She turned and saw Nadia coming to her.

"I should like to have a word with you, mother."

"What about?"

"About the conversation you had with André, up there."

"You were annoyed at seeing me talking to my son?"

"No. But the subject you were discussing. It seems that we ought to occupy separate rooms?"

"Well, since André has thought well to tell you, it is true. And if you want an explanation, you shall have it."

Madame Brennoy went up to Nadia, and looking her straight in the face, she said:

"You are killing my son."

"You are out of your mind"

"And your conduct is more dastardly than crimes that are punishable *They* come under the arm of the law One cannot legally punish a wife who is too loving towards her husband But one can condemn morally a woman who, cunningly, pushes into his grave the man whose name she bears And you are that woman"

The directness of the accusation leded undoubtedly to a terrible reaction A light flashed in Nadia's eyes Then mastering her resentment, she replied calmly, without raising her voice

"The seriousness of your suggestion is beyond all limits, my dear Pauline"

"Ah! Don't call me that"

"Very well But as for you, I beg you to reflect upon what you say I would rather attribute your remarks to an overwrought brain which prevents you from knowing exactly what you are about That can be your only excuse When you are in a reasonable state of mind we will continue this discussion Good night"

She was on the point of going Madame Brennoy stopped her, seizing her by the wrist

"One minute You think to turn the subject by suggesting that I am not in my right mind You can rest assured that my brain, though tired is clearer than you imagine, Countess Brasloff Countess! Ha! ha! Countess!!"

Madame Brennoy's sarcastic laughter frightened Nadia She no longer wanted to go away She wanted to find out how much her mother in law knew

"You condescend to listen to me now? Because you suspect that your imposture cannot be kept up for ever and that a day comes when lies are no longer of any avail. Ah! what a wonderful comedy you have been playing for the last two years. Countess Brasiloff—daughter of the Tzar's Chamberlain—a palace near Moscow—servants by the dozen. A charming romance to excite my sympathy! I had no idea at that time that the pure, honest, irreproachable woman in my employ was nothing of the kind; that she had been a *grue* at Pera."

"You believe all these calumnies that anyone brings up against me? All the filthy suggestions invented through jealousy."

"There are certain facts that are not inventions. . . . Do you forget your engagement as one of Madame Danaclis's women?"

The name upset Nadia's self-assurance. Madame Brennoy went on:

"One of my friends, who has been living at Stamboul for ten years, has given me an account of your past life. He has not omitted any details. So, when I accuse you, I know what I am talking about. A woman of your class is capable of anything."

Nadia was silent. It was no use trying to deny it. No doubt by a piece of bad luck her mother-in-law had come across a very well-informed man. However, she held up her head and retorted:

"Ah well, yes, I have a past. And what about it? Yes, I was forced, so as not to die of hunger, to sell myself like many other women. But in my

case it was distress that compelled me to do it, whilst others have not even the excuse of having nothing to eat."

"But that does not give you the right to assassinate your husband."

"I love him."

"You lie. If you loved him, you would refuse to comply with the caprices of an invalid and not help him to end his life. It is my wish that from to-morrow you cease all intimacy with him."

"Ah! ah! You are beginning that again!"

If you don't agree to it, I shall tell him all about your wretched past. He shall know where you come from."

Nadia went up to her mother-in-law, and in an undertone she declared:

"Then it is you who will kill him."

Madame Brennoy put her hand on the door handle ready to go and carry out her threat. Nadia, unperturbable, looked at her:

"Very well go and do it!"

Madame Brennoy did not move. She realised the futility of her threat. Circumstances were too strong for her. Cruel facts enchained her in their inhuman grip. She must bow her head to the storm and, with her hands tied, watch the inevitable happen.

Nadia knew that her mother-in-law was powerless. She enjoyed a trivial triumph. She went out, passing her with a contemptuous expression, far more wounding than her attack the moment before; and, as though she were offering friendly advice, she said:

"Go back to your room, dear mother. Your malaga and your biscuit are waiting for you."

She disappeared quickly into the hall. André's voice could be heard above calling :

"Come, Nadioucha. What are you doing ?"

Then Nadia called back :

"All right ! I'm coming, my love. Your mother and I have been having a chat."

The postman arrived at Plessis-Bréau every morning about eleven-thirty. Amélie brought Madame Brennoy's letters up to her room.

This morning, Madame Brennoy, having had a restless night, was asleep. Amélie had to awake her for her to sign the receipt of a large yellow registered envelope.

"It is from the bank. Put it down there, Amélie."

When she was alone, Madame Brennoy took the envelope and was surprised not to see the usual bank address printed on it. Further than that, her name was spelt " Brennois " and the writing seemed to be disguised.

"What is it ?"

She very soon found a piece of paper ruled in squares covered with words written in capitals. Amazed, she read as follows :

Madame, a friend who prefers to remain anonymous, but who holds you in great respect, feels it his duty to open your eyes regarding your slut of a daughter-in-law. It is indeed terrible that your son is married to a b—— like that. You will not find the word exaggerated when

you look at the enclosed packet. It is right for you to know what sort of a creature you have under your roof. She cannot say that it is the intention of lying tongues because of the photographs.

A friend who pities you very sincerely

XXX

Madame Brennoy opened the packet and found a dozen snaps and had no difficulty in recognising Nadia and another woman. Her amazement was so great that she did not pay much attention to the suggestive poses of the two friends at Lausanne. She looked at the letter. She examined the envelope. The stamp had the Tours postmark. The handwriting might be that of a servant taking her revenge. But it was possible that the writer had used this subterfuge to mislead suspicions. Who in the neighbourhood could have such compromising photographs, such flagrant proofs of her daughter-in-law's disgraceful conduct?

She looked once more at the photographs and gave a heartbroken "Oh!" So then everything went to prove irrefutably that Andre's wife was exactly as Monsieur Dassagny had described her. This time the monstrosity of proof made Madame Brennoy's heart beat. It was too much. There was a limit to her patience. Her self sacrifice had its bounds. Whatever passion Andre had for this woman, it was not possible that he could be so infatuated with such a monstrous creature, with such vice brought to the light of day. To be silent regarding such a revelation was unpardonable complicity which revolted her. She would go straight away and show him these proofs.

She rang for Amélie :

"Where is Monsieur André?"

"In his room, Madame."

"And Madame André Brennoy?"

"She went out riding very early. She said she would be back about noon."

Madame Brennoy dressed and knocked at his door. André, in a dressing gown, sitting in a long chair, was enjoying the delightful fresh air of this April morning.

"Good morning, mother. Up already? At half-past eleven? What favourable wind brings you here?"

Madame Brennoy had only brought the envelope and the photographs. She would not yet show the letter to her son.

"Well. This is what brings me. I have received these by post."

She scrutinised André's face as he looked at the snaps. To her intense astonishment, she saw a smile pass over his face and heard him reply, simply :

"Ah! yes—I know about them—Nadia showed me them in Switzerland."

He looked up. His mother's expression must have surprised him, for he appeared embarrassed.

"Evidently, they are not for your chaste eyes, my dear mother. But what annoys me is that they have been sent to you anonymously. Who, indeed, could have done it. Eh! But I have a suspicion. Nadia was very vexed, the other day, because ten of these photos had mysteriously vanished. She was sure, however, that she had

put them into one of the drawers of her writing table over there. How many are there? Ten? That's right. One of the servants has done it. What is the postmark on the envelope? Let me see. From Tours. There's no doubt about it."

Madame Brennoy was astonished. Her son's attitude was a terrible revelation to her. He had already seen these snaps. Nadia had shown them to him. So he approved of this impudence in vice. Was he then a consenting party in this nameless debauch? Her own son, so carefully brought up, whose education had been the chief care of her highly proper and irreproachable widowhood, her son was corrupted to such an extent! Was it his illness that made him lose all self-respect? Was it his temperament which showed itself in this outrageous libertinage, which induced him to smile when he ought to have blushed with shame and confusion?

She could find nothing to say. She left the room as if she had been struck. As she walked along the corridor she faltered and staggered. She was so heart-broken, so overcome, so worn out that she sat down in her room, her head bent, staring vacantly.

After lunch, Andre and Nadia came to see her and inquire if her headache had gone. She reassured her son. Then André added:

"By the way, mother. Nadia and I are absolutely convinced that the sender of the anonymous packet this morning is the work of one of your servants. One cannot say exactly who is

responsible for it, but we think it is either Edgar or Louis. Will you be good enough to dismiss them both this very evening."

Nadia chimed in :

"You understand, mother? What is merely a childish freak and concerns only André and me ought not to be the subject of conversation in the servants' quarters. I insist, therefore. The chauffeur and the butler must be dismissed to-day. If they are here to-morrow, I regret to say I shall be obliged to go, myself."

And André concluded :

"But come . . . but of course, that's settled. Mother will pack them off at once. Won't you, mother?"

XXIII

ANDRÉ is in bed in his room. Nadia, according to doctor's orders, is in the Empire room. André no longer leaves his bed. His hollow face, his sunken eyes, his difficult breathing betray the seriousness of his condition. Dr. Schwer's prediction has been fulfilled to the very letter. The patient's imprudences and follies have hastened the course of the illness. Galloping consumption has set in. His case is now hopeless.

The doctors that Madame Brennoy has called in have had a consultation and come to the conclusion that it would be useless for him to return to the sanatorium. The invalid will die peacefully at Plessis-Bréau. He is resting, his hands moist, his head on the pillow, his eyes fixed. The hospital nurse is there sitting in silence. Through the open windows giving on to the trees comes the warm May sun. It is the apotheosis of spring on the roses in the flower beds sprinkled with dainty confetti from the fresh green acacia trees.

Beneath his heavy eyelids he stares incessantly at the marble statue. *Passion Lighting the World* stands on her pedestal between the two windows. A white phantom, with her fixed gesture of shameless pride, *Passion* looks down upon him regardless of his illness, unmoved to pity.

André seems to be hypnotised by the marble. Like a subject under the influence of a mesmerist, he tries to resist. His hands grasp the sheet. His difficult breathing grows quicker. Suddenly, terror distorts his pale face and he cries out :

“Mother !”

The nurse comes up to him :

“Do you want anything ?”

But the invalid does not move his head. He repeats :

“Mother !”

The nurse goes out and comes back with Madame Brennoy, who is anxious. André, without seeing her, feels his mother's presence in the room. He beckons her with a movement of his hand, and with his eyes immutably fixed on the statue, he whispers :

“Mother. Stay alone with me.”

The nurse goes out. Madame Brennoy bends over her son and follows the direction of his gaze.

“What is it, my dear ?”

“Mother. Look over there. It is Nadia.”

“Why no, my boy. It is a statue.”

“No, mother. It is she, looking at me . . . there. You recognise her ?”

“No, my dear. It is only the statue of a woman.”

André's two feverish hands cling on to his mother's shoulders. Fear distorts his face again. He speaks in a raucous voice, panting for breath :

“It is Nadia, I tell you. She is defying me.

She's taunting me You can hear her voice,
mother Protect me ! "

" You have nothing to fear, my dear I am
here "

" Tell her not to look at me like that "

André shudders and trembles in his mother's
arms She smooths his forehead, frightened by
his hallucination

Suddenly, he sits up in bed .

" There, she is coming towards me ! Kill her,
mother ! Take her away ! Get her away ! So
that I shan't see her any more ! Please mother,
please Kill her . . . that white woman who is
coming at me "

Madame Breanoy rushes to the table She
pushes the statue on its pedestal The marble is
heavy She pushes it again It scarcely moves
Passion, inexorable as ever, continues to raise her
arm towards the sky André's excitement
gradually subsides He calls his mother to him
He takes her in his arms

Terror disappears from his face His rigid body
relaxes He weeps in silence He murmurs .

" Mother It's all over with me "

" Husb, my boy You are weak, but in a
fortnight's time you will be stronger "

" You are kind to try and deceive me But I
know all about it My number is up It is hard
lines to die so soon "

" My dear My André Don't say such terri-
ble things You are mistaken You will get
better "

" Darling mother You almost look as though

you thought it. Oh! it would be good, it would be comforting to believe it. But it's all over. Do you understand. I can't breathe any longer . . . the chimney doesn't draw. So there is only one thing left. It's a nasty word to say, mother—die!—I shall not even see my twenty-fourth birthday. I should . . . I . . . wait a moment.”

André stops to rest on his pillow. He continues :

“I should have liked to have done something before I passed out. You see I have been able to accomplish nothing of any use, with this illness. Mine is a wasted life. I could, all the same, have enjoyed myself until I was thirty. It is not asking much. Thirty, mother.”

Madame Brennoy embraces her son without saying a word. She makes a great effort to keep back her tears. André's resignation, and the gentleness of his regrets, break her heart. She wants to give him hope, to hide the sad truth from him. But he knows only too well the progress of his disease, to be deceived.

“My dear mother”—he, in turn, puts his arms round her—“I shall soon be leaving you all alone. After father, it is I who will part from you. You will be here at the end of June, as you were last year, when I arrived from the sana . . . But I, I shall no longer be here to tap you for ten thousand. Do you remember? At Tours with my Bavarian student friend. I can tell you now. It doesn't matter. It was a little girl I met in the train. A man's life is a round of women . . . until the grave. My last one will be Nadia. Ah!

mother, what a pity you do not get on with her
Ah! yes It's very sad "

"Don't tire yourself, my dear Don't say any
thing more I am here, near you "

"I want to talk to you, mother Let me
Let us take advantage, whilst I can still I
understand my case I have seen cases with the
same symptoms—one keeps it at bay, and then
one breaks up without realising it What was I
saying? Oh! yes It is a pity that between you
and Nadia there is this incomprehensible antipathy
When I am gone, you will at any rate have a
daughter in law to console you, who will remind
you of our happy times Anyway, she loves me
very much, you know "

André stops suddenly and stares at the white
statue In a changed voice, he continues, very
quietly

"Tell me now What was the matter with
me a few minutes ago? When I looked at the
marble, I seemed to be afraid "

"Why no, André "

"That's funny, I have a feeling that it was—er—
how can I say? Yes—fear—that's the word
Tell me, Nadia did not come into the room this
afternoon? "

"How could she come? You know quite well
that she has gone out She has taken the car and
has gone riding with the Morèze's "

"Then she's not come back yet? "

"No "

"It's curious I had a vague feeling that she
came in whilst I was dozing and stared at me from

over there, near the statue. And then you came and she went out. Have I been dreaming?"

"Of course. When I came in, you were restless in your sleep. I sat by you and you regained consciousness."

"Ah? Is that it?"

"Yes, I promise you."

"These nightmares are silly! As if Nadia was really able to come here to defy me with the strange look of that carved *Passion*! Dear Nadia. I say, mother . . . Don't you think that you could, once and for all, bury the past and honestly be on affectionate terms with my wife? It is the wish of a dying man. So . . . will you?"

"Why yes, my dear. You know that your wishes are my wishes."

"I should die more satisfied if I were sure that you and she would like one another for my sake."

.

Two taps. The door opens very gently. Nadia appears. She is in riding dress, beige breeches and white hunting stock. Her cheeks are rosy from her recent ride. Her eyes bright. It is life in full vigour which enters the room, where death has already placed his warning mark. Nadia puts her riding whip and her bag on the little table by the bedside; she bends over, tenderly and anxiously:

"Have you slept well, my Dédé?"

"Yes, Nadioucha. Mother has been keeping me company. You have just come at the right time. I want to talk to you both. But first tell me about your ride."

"Yes, go and come back quickly."

"I'll step into the boudoir. A quarter of an hour, just to make myself beautiful, eh, Dédé?"

Nadia disappeared full of joy. André lay back on his pillow. His face turned towards the window, he watches the tops of the beech trees and the acacias. With the indifference of a Buddhist already not of this material world, ready for Nirvana the consoler, he awaits his approaching end. These beautiful green trees will wave their leaves in the sunshine when he will have left this world of busy mortals. Those most dear to him, his wife and his mother, after having wept over him, will take their meals here, reconciled; they will grow happy, they will live their life, under the peaceful eye of Forgetfulness, the great healer. What a strange illusion to imagine that everything dies with us! Like the vegetation in the jungle which thrives on the humus of centuries accumulated round its roots; humans live and thrive quite indifferent to the dust of the dead that they kick up at every step.

In his enfeebled brain he kept pondering over these truisms whilst his eyes gazed mechanically at the leaves trembling in the breeze. Suddenly, he had an idea of surprising Nadia. He picks up a piece of paper and a pencil and sits up to scribble these lines:

*To the beautiful horsewoman of Croix Haute Wood!
Madame, you will come back to your room and will
find this little love letter in your bag. He who sends it,
loves you. This is a true statement of fact. Your
Dédé."*

André looks up, his eyes fall upon the white statue. The hallucination comes back to him. Nadia is there fixing him afresh with her piercing eyes, eyes that are defying him.

He utters a cry, throws back the bedclothes, gets up and rushes at the marble. He seizes the body in his arms like an enemy that he wishes to terrify, to strangle with his own hands. The statue rocks on its pedestal. He struggles with it, as with a living being. The marble falls on the floor. André falls with it. They lie there at the foot of the bed. Passion broken, the sick man insensible.

Madame Brennoy comes into the room, followed by the nurse. They rush to him. Whilst the nurse tries to bring him back to consciousness, Madame Brennoy sees the crumpled paper near his hand. She suspects something. She reads Captain de Brégeac's note. She gazes with infinite distress at her son who, helped to his knees by the nurse, is gradually regaining his senses. Just then, as the door opens, Nadia exclaims in a gay voice :

"Here I am, Dédé. I haven't been long!"

She comes in. She stands thunderstruck. Then Madame Brennoy gets up, goes to her and shows her the letter. Nadia turns deathly white. She realises instantly the drama that her carelessness has created. Madame Brennoy pushes her towards the boudoir and says to her in a merciless voice :

"Go. If you come near this room again I will have you turned out by my servants!"

ANDRÉ BRENNVOY is dead. Asphyxia has done its work. For five days, barely conscious, he had lain on his bed, stupefied. The end had come, a happy release.

His mother watches over him for the last time. She has informed Nadia that she must remain in her room. When the time of the funeral arrives, for the sake of the family, she will play the part of a disconsolate widow. Appearances will be saved. But Madame Brennoy will spend the last night alone with her son.

The shutters are closed. The windows are shut. Two large candles are burning on each side of the bed. A moth, which flies silently close to the ceiling, weaves its ceaseless arabesques in the yellow light. Madame Brennoy is seated in a chair. She seems to be transfixed by grief. In her overwhelming sorrow she cherishes in her mind the idea that her son is not really dead—a sweet illusion, a consoling chumera of his undivided affection. The drama of the letter, a few days before the end, was torture to her unhappy boy. The brutal discovery of his wife's misconduct tore aside the veil which hid from him the truth. This terrible revelation aggravated his agony.

Time passes. Madame Brennoy can still hear André's heartbroken moans of distress. After a

deep drawn sigh, drawing his mother closer to him, he murmurs :

"Mother. You were right. She has played a horrible game. It is terrible. Why has she made me suffer like this when I cannot defend myself? I loved her so ! "

And it was always this *leit motiv* which kept repeating itself in his distress, this despairing *leit motiv* which rang through his grief :

"I loved her so. I loved her so ! "

Time passes. Madame Brennoy, with tear-stained face, does not move. For a week, from the moment when she found her son unconscious near the broken statue, she has been asking herself in the depth of her heart if there are not some crimes which go unpunished, if there are not some crimes which escape penalty, according to the laws of the social world.

Time passes. A growing desire creeps into her mind to avenge her son's death. To-morrow he will be laid to rest. But over there in her room, his widow, already free, is doubtless thinking of her newly-born liberty, of her approaching happiness, of getting away to live her life and to enjoy her wealth.

Madame Brennoy bends her head, her heart torn by sorrow. Around the tall candles the moth silently continues its tireless dance.

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The burial is over. Aunt Berthe and other relations have attended the funeral service with Madame Brennoy. The outside world understands

that Nadia, overcome with distress, remained at the chateau

It is nine o'clock in the evening Aunt Berthe has insisted on keeping her sister company, but the latter has promised to leave Plessis Bréau the following day and come and stay with her at Vendôme

Madame Brennoy had not dined The servants have gone to talk things over in the head gardener's cottage, whilst the nurse, tired out, has retired to the room formerly occupied by the companion

Madame Brennoy is standing, dressed in deep mourning, at the open window looking out on to the peaceful park With her hands on the window rail she is listening to the almost imperceptible sound of the rustling leaves under the starry night She goes out silently along the cotridor on the first floor, passing her dead son's room without stopping, and knocks gently at the door of the Empire room

"Come in!"

Nadia is there, in deep mourning, lying in a rest chair Madame Brennoy speaks to her in a hard voice

"I have come to you because my poor boy charged me with a mission"

"What is it?"

"Before he died he said to me that he had left something for you in the tower room"

"Something for me?"

"Yes, a small chest that he put up there when he was still strong Will you come with me and take possession of it?"

"Yes. I'll follow you."

The two women go out into the corridor and walk in silence to the floor above—two black shadows wending their way along the grey stone passage. At the end of this passage a narrow spiral staircase leads to the top of the Plessis-Bréau tower, the oldest part of the château. Madame Brennoy pushes open the heavy door, turns on the light, and stands back for Nadia to enter.

The room is small and square, crowned with a network of beams which support the roof exposed to the weather by four openings with no doors. It is surrounded by a narrow ledge without a parapet. In olden days it had served as a look-out post for the defenders of the château.

Madame Brennoy points to a wooden box on the table.

"It is for you. My son entrusted me to give it to you."

"What is it?"

"Look."

Nadia bent over the box, which contained the photographs taken at Lausanne with the English girl. She shuts down the lid, and turning round asks:

"Is it for this you brought me here?"

"No. I give you back these disgusting things because they are worthy of you! But I have brought you here to speak to you."

"We have nothing more to say to each other."

Madame Brennoy turns. She looks at Nadia, who is at the door.

"Where are you going?"

"Back to my room."

Nadia tries in vain to open it. It is locked. The key is not there. Madame Brennoy's voice sounds hard and unrelenting.

"You shall hear me, however, whether you wish or not."

"Very well, I'm listening."

Then, more quietly, hammering out her words, Madame Brennoy continues:

"What I have to say to you first is that you are a criminal. If there is any justice in the world, you shall expiate your crime."

"Oh! I beg you, no grand words, please. Open this door and let me go."

"Is it fear that makes you wish to go?"

"Me, afraid?"

Nadia comes nearer, her eyes flashing, her mouth set. Nervousness begins to parch her throat. But she controls herself. She replies in the same hard tone:

"Why do you reproach me? Your son loved me without my trying to win him. He has given me money without my asking for it. Am I to blame that he has died of an illness for which I am not responsible? I, a criminal, when I have submitted to the kisses of a sick man that no one else wanted!"

"I do not allow you to insult my poor boy whom you have killed."

"Do not accuse me without proofs!"

"Without proofs! Why the proofs of your premeditation are clear to anyone, and I have no doubt that a woman with a past like yours is capable of anything!"

“Again my past! You, who are born rich, an industrial millionairess, bulging with gold and egoism, you make me laugh when you throw my faults in my face. Have you lived through a monstrous, bloody and atrocious revolution that the western world has already forgotten and forgiven for its nameless horrors? Have you been marked down at the age of eighteen as a suspect? Have you lived hidden in the rooms of an old courtesan who made love to tchekists when they became too curious? When you were a young girl, made much of by your parents, were you forced to give yourself to a drunken sailor who could take you secretly on to a boat? Fortune has given you luxury, money, happiness. For me, she has reserved misery and exile. Yes, I have been a *grue* in order to save my life. But I am to blame neither more nor less than certain of your friends who pay lovers or who sleep discreetly with rich men for a rope of pearls or a few diamonds. Ah! no. Righteous indignation of this sort is no good, Madame Brennoy! Life has handled me roughly, wounded me, bruised me. Life has withheld from me everything that a pretty woman has a right to expect; so I have said to myself that I have a right to happiness. And my happiness was not to get up at night to read you to sleep with poetry, nor to run all over your château to fetch your malaga, your biscuits, your bag, your keys, your smelling salts, your cachets, your cushions. I revolted naturally. I longed for my revenge. I have had it.”

“Your apology for your vice does not move me

in the least I knew it all I have heard that sort of thing on the stage That sort of stuff moves the gallery "

"I I have played this drama in reality, Madame ! "

"The real drama is that you have worn André out in order to get rid of him more quickly."

"You forget that he loved me "

"If you had really loved him, you would have taken care of him, you would have tried to save him "

"I cannot perform a miracle, and your reproaches are stupid "

"You are a horrible woman, and if it hadn't been for you my poor boy would still be here What do I reproach you with? With having killed him with your caresses You have not tried to temper his passion, you have tried to excite it You have killed him Do you hear? Killed him! And you have added the horror of an infidelity with your lover, this Bregeat, an infidelity which tortured my poor André in the last hours of his agony "

"My infidelity! You throw that in my face To have looked for a consolation to the marriage with an invalid! Why, it was my right! I submitted myself to your son to the end, but now I will live ! "

"Live with the millions that you have made him give you, the sequel to this comedy of unselfishness which you played to my poor child You are going to drag his name in the mire from which you come? Ah, well, you are going to do nothing of the kind ! "

"You have brought me here to insult me, that is enough. Open this door!"

"No! I shall not open it."

Madame Brennoy's resolution angers Nadia, whose anxiety increases.

"This is enough! I have no account to render to you and it is very good of me to come here and talk to you."

Madame Brennoy's stare becomes fixed. A tremor of suppressed rage agitates her hands. She is nothing more than a maddened mother haunted by a desire to avenge the death of her son. She lowers her voice in order to articulate slowly:

"No, you will not go out of here by the door."

The two women in black are now standing face to face in the room with its grey walls. Madame Brennoy's last words come from her pursed lip like a sentence of death. Has Nadia foreseen in the look of her adversary the omen of her condemnation? A strange prescience has made her realise that her life is in danger? By instinct she has stepped back two paces. She watches Madame Brennoy's hand, fearing that she is armed with a revolver. With dexterity, she hopes to be able to elude a shot badly aimed. But Madame Brennoy is not armed. . . . She has seen Nadia suddenly near the square opening that gives on to the circular ledge, barely two feet wide; Nadia whose dark silhouette is outlined against the background of the starry night. Then, with incredible swiftness for a woman of her age, with a spring that her weight made irresistible, Madame Brennoy rushes forward with outstretched arms; she forces

Nadia, taken by surprise at the assault, to fall backwards. Hanging in mid air, she clings desperately to the edge of the ledge. Her hand is there, white on the dark stone like the band of a shipwrecked person sinking into the depths. Madame Brennoy bends down and, with all her strength, forces the gripping fingers to let go. The white hand disappears. A terrified shriek pierces the night air. Then nothing, nothing except a dull thud far below on the gravel path at the foot of the tower. Nothing but the silence of the old grey tower, silence hanging round a woman in black, with haggard face and icy hands.

Madame Brennoy goes quickly down the spiral staircase. She reaches her room. Hurriedly she takes off her dress and gets into her large bed. She is trembling terribly. The chilly sheets make her shudder. She waits. She is satisfied. She has at last avenged her son. Gradually her shivering ceases. She swallows at a gulp a small glass of cognac. The warmth of the spirit banishes the cold feeling. She puts her head on her pillow. She waits.

Suddenly, hurried steps. A knock at the door. The nurse's voice, trembling with alarm:

"Madame! Madame!"

She comes in and finds her in bed.

"Madame, I am sorry to wake you. I have just heard a scream in the park. I wondered whatever it could be. In the end I got up, and . . . Oh! it is frightful. I have found Madame

André Brennoy senseless at the foot of the tower. I am afraid that she is dead."

"What are you talking about? My daughter-in-law . . . dead! You must wake the servants . . . go and send for a doctor."

Madame Brennoy dresses as quickly as possible. The housemaid, the new butler and the nurse go with her into the garden. They examine Nadia by the light of a pocket torch. The nurse sounds her heart. It is no longer beating. She shakes her head.

"I am afraid there is nothing to be done, alas!"

"We must wait for the doctor that Edmond has gone to fetch."

A death watch in the garden beside the woman whose right temple is stained with blood, whose torn dress exposes a pretty limp leg in a well-fitting black silk stocking. The car arrives with the doctor. The result of his examination is that the vertebral column is broken, that the skull is fractured in several places and that the poor woman was killed instantly as she fell. Without doubt, she has thrown herself from the top of the tower.

"Your opinion, doctor, is?" Madame Brennoy asks.

"Oh—suicide. Notice the position of the body with regard to the tower, sixty feet high. There is no trace of violence . . . no mark of a wound by firearm or knife. The post-mortem will confirm it, I'm convinced. Your unhappy daughter-in-law has killed herself, Madame."

"Then, will you inform the authorities?"

"Yes, to-morrow morning the police at Tours

will be notified. An official of the court will go into everything. But it will be merely a formality. He will at once give permission for the burial. It is obvious that your poor son's widow, Madame, has put an end to her days. Her grief was too great to allow her to live after the death of her husband."

Madame Brennoy is back in her room. The nurse is watching beside the corpse lying on the bed. Madame Brennoy takes the box that she has brought down from the watch tower and opens it. She has thrown the photographs one by one on to the burning logs, and they are flaming up the chimney. For she has had the fire lighted. She was still cold. The offending effigies of the dead woman crumple up and are burnt. Of the photographs there remains nothing but a scrap of ash amongst other ashes in the glowing hearth.

A year has passed. The death of Madame André Brennoy, who committed suicide because she could not live without her husband, has been the subject of conversation amongst the grand dames in the district. They have commented at length on the romantic gesture of this model wife who, on the evening of the funeral, threw herself from the watch tower of Plessis Bréau. Her friends and distant relatives have been to express their sympathy.

"Your poor daughter in law! What a sad end for a young and pretty woman. Ah! how she loved your dear André!"

And Madame Brennoy, unmoved, listens

Her sister alone seeks to solve the enigma of the drama. She asks :

" Really, Pauline, can you tell me why this girl killed herself? Knowing what we do, both of us, about poor Dédé's wife, how can you account for Nadia, free and with money from her husband, throwing herself from the top of the tower that night? I assure you that there is something mysterious about it, that I have not yet been able to explain satisfactorily."

" Neither have I, Berthe. It is true that this woman had a lover! You remember. . . . The letter."

" Yes. Captain de Brégeac."

" Can there have been some secret disagreement between them? Shall we ever know? Perhaps he broke off with her as soon as she was free? "

" He was not questioned by the coroner? "

" No. No one knew about their liaison. Naturally I said nothing about it. I did not wish to complicate matters by bringing to light things that concerned nobody. To create a post-humous scandal. To advertise to the world that she deceived my poor boy, when he had only a few weeks to live. What would have been the good? "

" No. You are quite right."

" Besides the suicide was so obvious that the finding by the court was arrived at at once. There is nothing more to be said. So much the better for the memory of my dear lost one."

" So you prefer to come back and live here. You don't want to stay with me at Vendôme? "

"Thank you, no, Berthe You are kind But I feel nearer to him here I can at any rate go often to the cemetery and put flowers on his grave Besides, I shall not be alone The Morèze's have found a reader for me, a woman about my own age, poor, honest and of irreproachable character, Madame de Saint Champ I like her very much You will see She is very nice"

The end of June draws near Roses are in bloom in the park Life goes on at the chateau Madame de Saint Champ has taken up her duties with the chatelaine of Plessis Bréau The tower, with its observation room, points up to the blue sky, wreathed by the swallows' flights Madame Brennoy, lying on a rest chair on the terrace, her head leaning on the cushions that Madame de Saint Champ has placed so comfortably, is listening to her reading the daily paper that has just arrived

The lady in black, with grey hair, her eye glasses on her nose, is reading the summary of the latest news Politics, general news, first night criticisms Madame Brennoy, from a distance, catches sight of a photograph on the fifth page She asks

"What is that there?"

"It is a picture of a statue, Madame"

And Madame de Saint Champ reads the following lines

THE SALON OF FRENCH ARTISTS

The members of the jury of the sculpture section yesterday awarded their medal of honour The

successful winner is the young sculptor, Monsieur Daniel Roubiac, whose latest work has been highly praised by the critics. It is a magnificent statue of a woman entitled *Passion Lighting the World*.

Madame Brennoy's heart beats more quickly. She puts out her hand to look at the picture. It is the statue, reproduced in marble, in a smaller size, which stood formerly in André's room. Madame Brennoy shuts her eyes. She shudders. Madame de Saint-Champ goes to her, concerned.

"You are cold, Madame? Won't you have a rug round you?"

"No thank you. You are very kind. Go and fetch my malaga and my biscuits. You know . . . on the little table by my bed."

"Yes, Madame."

She goes. Madame Brennoy, her head on the cushions, the paper on her knees, raises her eyes. Her gaze rests on the weather-beaten and time-worn tower that will for ever keep its secret; that ancient square tower around which the swallow's love to fly, making fantastic patterns.